

TELUGU SAINTS AND SAGES

Vol.-I

Telugu
Prof. B. RAMA RAJU

English
Prof. M. SIVARAMA KRISHNA

SRI SAI PUBLICATIONS
HYDERABAD
2005

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Vol. -1

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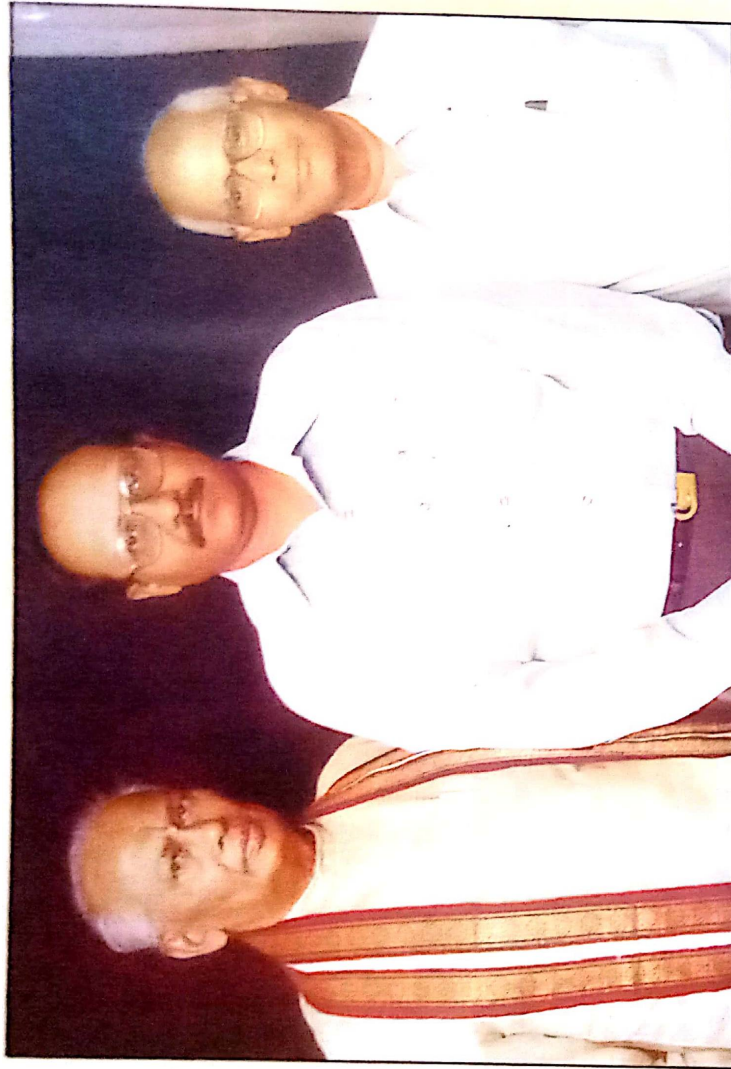
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DEDICATED WITH LOVE TO



SREE RAM SIR

On His 48th Birthday 11.5.2005



MOTHER AND THE KITTEN

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

Telugu Saints and Sages is a remarkable book in many ways. There are many "biographies" of Telugu saints and sages (notably by Panguluri Veeraraghavudu, Medapati Venkata Reddy in Telugu and R. Krishnamurti in English). But Professor Rama Raju's book has a unique edge over all of them. These are not hazy, hagiographical, romanticized stories of Telugu saints. Professor Rama Raju's research is thorough, the attempt to ascertain facts and sift them from fancies is comprehensive, meticulous but not dogmatic or rigid. The dimensions of myth are given their proper place without an irritable tendency to dismiss them as pious fables. Similarly, like many writers in this area, Professor Raju does not shy away from the miracles. He does not go in search of the miraculous, but when it stares him in the face, he does not blink or become self-conscious. It is presented almost in a clinical way.

This is due, it seems to me, for an obvious reason. Professor Rama Raju - he holds the prestigious post of National Research Professor- early came into contact with Bhagavan Sri Satya Sai Baba. Baba obviously nourished his nascent inner quest and made it take root, put forth foliage and eventually flower and fructify. Hence the miraculous obviously appeared to Professor Rama Raju not as magic and mystery which titillate sterile curiosity; but as "visiting cards" of the radiant presence of illimitable love. All psychic powers do not emerge from love of miracles but emanate from and evoke the miracle of love in all its splendor, serenity and peace. As our mentor Sri Ram says, "God does miracles not to demonstrate His strength but to prevent us from running away from Him." And once we stop running away, we perceive that "all that is natural is, in fact, supernatural; and all that is supernatural is natural."

Moreover, Professor Rama Raju's book (this is the first of four volumes published so far, with a fifth round the corner) is also the natural corollary of a distinguished academic and administrative career. From literature to

religion (or spirituality) is a logical, natural step. Literature has an imaginative engagement with love, faith, death and everything else that the artist encounters. But saints and sages go a step further and what imagination shows, they perceive, as an experienced truth. In a grain of sand they literally see Infinity. Kavi sees, saint / sage sees through the Reality that creates, sustains and dissolves all aspects of the world as an enacted leela of the Lord. It is this experiences that shows itself in the remarkable chronicles of the 35 saints who appear in this book. And curiously, many saints and sages are writers themselves - an aspect which is now increasingly gaining attention. Saints take off (in writing) where the creative writer gets grounded on the runway paved with the perils of mere words: sabdajalam maharanyam chittabhramana karanam. This is another dimension that Professor Rama Raju painstakingly records.

Many of these saints and sages lived in the ordinary, folk ethos. They belong to the so-called marginal (ised) groups and they represent, as it were, the "subaltern" dimension which kept the classical on its toes, often threatening to subvert it. And, it is fascinating that among them are women who found in spiritual patterns the freedom to subvert even marriage. But avoiding the excesses that plague feminist radicalism. (The chronicles of Telugu women saints have been put together in a separate volume in Telugu by Professor B. Rukmini who made her own invaluable contribution to her father's colossal enterprise.) Obviously, the folk ethos is down Prof. Rama Raju's line: for he almost single-handed pioneered the emergence of folk studies in Telugu universities; his own doctoral work on Andhra Folk Literature signaled this phenomenon.

My translation closely follows the original almost line by line. I have resisted the temptation to make some aspects acceptable to English or Anglicised readers who have their own pet notions about translation and narratives of a religious nature. These narratives belong to a cross-section of pan-Telugu regions. Some Telugu Yogis lived in the north, Gujarat, Maharashtra, while some "migrated" from there to the Andhra region. This is to underline that the land of the spirit knows no boundaries,

regional or linguistic. They fly in the vast, boundless spaces of the spirit whose wings can never be clipped by regionalism.

In his life of Trilinga Swami, poet Vaddadi Sitaramanjaneya wrote:

*The nature of the ignorant is to run after mirages;
Why do the Telugus subject themselves to such a plight ?
Exist in the Telugu race itself countless saints and sages
repositories of wisdom, all.*

No one need regret now. Prof. Rama Raju has chronicled the lives of more than 200 Telugu saints and sages and rescued them from the obscurity that shrouded them so long. He has done this colossal work in four sumptuous volumes at the advanced age of 80 riddled with health problems. And this in itself-as he himself would agree - is the miracle of love that these saints and sages performed, imbuing him with the dynamic energy that the stupendous work involves.

In thank Professor Rama Raju for choosing me as a translator though I am sure my slowy (alas, not very steady) progress with the work might have annoyed him. For my part, I can only say that I feel highly privileged to do this wonderful work. He himself collaborated in a big way and it is his goodness that he asked me to do this, as I know very well that he could have done it himself (an evidence is his recent book Contribution of Andhra to Sanskrit Literature in English.)

My inexpressible, immense gratitude goes to my mentor SRI RAM whose confidence in and love for me sustained me (as it always does) throughout this undertaking. He is, himself, the Source and Repository of all that I found in the chronicles of these sages and saints. My pranams to Sadguru Sri Sivananda Murti garu for his blessings which came at the right moment when this project was being thought of. Sri Gunesh garu remained a source of constant prodding. Thanks to him, also.

M. SIVARAMA KRISHNA

GRATITUDE

At the outset let me first express my grateful thanks to Prof. M. Sivaramakrishna, a prolific writer in English for rendering my book Andhra Yogulu (Andhra Saints and Sages) into English as Telugu Saints and Sages and making available to the English readers. Prof. Siva Ramakrishna is deeply drunk in the divine saga of Ramakrishna Paramahansa and his order. The sun with innumerable rays sucks the water from even a local pond, turns it into clouds and then in turn spreads all over the sky and finally lets it rain all over the globe. Likewise Prof. Sivaramakrishna digested my regional language book in Telugu and by translating it into English made known thereby to English readers all over the globe. He chose 35 out of 50 biographies from the first volume of Andhra Yogulu and translated them into English with insight and facile pen. He prefers Telugu to Andhra the synonyms though the latter is older historically. Both words stand for race region and language.

Due to my ignorance in the field of spirituality, I have labelled these saints and sages as Andhras. Saints and Sages, the representatives of God on earth, here, there and everywhere do not belong to any region, race, language, caste and creed. Their thoughts are actions, they live in loneliness, speak the language of the heart, and dwell where our frontiers end. To them God is breath, sight, food and drink and fuel to the lamp of life. As a historical biographer I confined them to Andhra, when I read books on saints and sages of Maharashtra, Tamilnadu, Gujrat and Bengal in the personal library of Dr. Santaram Tipnis living in the Kanya Kumari Samsthan at Sakori. He wrote many books on Upasani Baba the Saint disciple of Shirdi Sai Baba and Upasani's disciple Godawari Mayi. It was at Sakori where I was compelled to take up this project 'Andhra Yogulu.' I have published Andhra Yogulu in 4 volumes and dedicated them to Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba of Puttaparti the real source of my inspiration.

These 4 volumes consist of biographies of 210 saints and sages. Whether Andhras or non-Andhras born inside or outside Andhra Pradesh, Hindus or Muslims, Men or Women they chose their field of activity as ordained by God in some part of Andhra. They include Andhras by race

born inside or outside of Andhra Pradesh but settled down in far of non-Andhra areas like Tamilnadu, Maharashtra, Orissa, U.P. Gujrat, Karnataka etc. These Saints and Sages with their penance, innate virtues, love, compassion and wisdom guided the masses on their life journey without distinctions of rich and poor, caste and creed, rescued them from imminent death or danger, solving their knotty problems and bestowing peace of mind and granting them boons of health, wealth and offspring. The Samadhis of these Saints inside and outside AP which exude fragrance of compassion and spirituality are now places of pilgrimage and worship. I am grateful to Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba and the Saints and Sages who made me write these volumes. My daughter Prof. B. Rukmini has been and is of immense help to me in accomplishing this task, besides being a parent to her aged parents. I pray to God to bless her for completing this project even without me. I am thankful to my friend M. Gunesh whose sincere dream to see the English version of my book has been realised today. I am indebted to E. Sekhar, Dr. Sumita Roy, and B.R. Raju for correcting the first, second and final proofs respectively.

On behalf of Prof. M. Sivaramakrishna and on my own behalf I dedicate this book to Sree Ram Sir, our friend philosopher and guide. Sree Ram Sir has many names. Different devotees and admirers call him differently as Light, Sight, Love, Compassion, Mercy, Sweetness, Smile, Hide - and - seek, Eluder etc. Like a mother cat which protects its kitten, so does Sree Ram Sir protect us, according to MaarjaalaKishora Nyaaya. I am grateful to Sir for accepting this humble offering on his 48th Birth Day on 11-5-2005. We are much more grateful and obliged to H.H. Sri Kandukuri Sivananda Murty of "Anandavanam", Bhimunipatnam a modern saint cast in the mould of ancient Rishis, committed to revitalise Sanatana Dharma has kindly condescended to associate himself with the releasing and dedication ceremony of this book Telugu Saints and Sages on 11 -5-2005. In him both God and man enjoy each other. We all invoke his blessings.

S.S. 1927, Paarthiva

Chaitra bahula saptami, Uttaraashaadha.
80th Birthday

B. RAMA RAJU

(30.5.2005)

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1. SRI VIDYARANYA (1296-1386)

Whenever dharma declines and adharma advances, the reestablishment of dharma is done by God Himself or His Incarnations who are endowed with His amsas or aspects. Though India was subjected to foreign invasions even before the Christian era, there was no decline in dharma or an attack on it. These foreign invasions were motivated by the greed for wealth or for the extension of their empire. But the invasion of Muslims and the atrocities they committed, frontally hurt and injured the intrinsic dharma. Hindu culture and religion became a victim to their cruelty. Sind in 8th century A.D., Panchala in 11th, and by the 14th century North India came under the hegemony of the Muslims.

Gradually, the Delhi rulers turned their attention to South India. The most dominant kingdoms in the south during that period were the Yadavas of Devagiri, the Kakatiya Kingdom at Orugal (Warangal of today), the Kampili Kingdom of Anegondi, the Hoyasala Kingdom of Dwarasamudra, and the Pandya Kingdom of Madhura. These rulers always quarrelled among themselves and even when there was an imminent threat to their traditions, culture and religion, they could never achieve any unity among themselves. Consequently, the Delhi sultans occupied these kingdoms, gradually, one by one. Dwarasamudra in 1311, Devagiri in 1315, Orugal in 1323 and Madhura in 1330, were captured by the Muslims.

It was at this time that the two brothers Hakka and Bukka who were employed under the Kakatiya rulers ran away and took shelter under Kampiliraya of Anegondi (who was also related to them). But in 1327 the armies of Tughlaq ravaged the entire area of Anegondi and captured the two brothers. The sultan took them to Delhi, converted them to Islam and employed them in his court. The atrocities that the Delhi rulers and their armies perpetrated on Hindus in South India beggar description. These atrocities are described in texts such as Madhura Vijaya (1358) written by Gangadevi, Abhitistava of Vedanta Desika, the writings of foreign travellers such as Ferishta, Ibn Batuta, Nuniz, etc. We have also

vivid description in edicts such as Vilasasasana (1327), Kaluvacheru edict (1423) of Anithalli. In that period rivers of blood flowed of cows and Brahmins. Maths and temples became Masjids. Countless women were raped and killed. The heroic men were slaughtered. Out of fear, selfishness or by compulsion many became Muslims. Men and women became orphans.

Seeing the pitiable state of Hindu dharma and culture, filled with intense sorrow, a few heroic souls constituted themselves into a National Council and between 1324 and 1344 liberated various Andhra regions gradually from the pythonic grip of Muslim rulers. To quell this rebellion Mohammed Bin Tughlaq dispatched Malik Maqbool - the former army captain of Pratapa Rudra, called Gannaya Sahini who became Maqbool after conversion to Islam - to Orugul. He also sent, along with the army, the brothers Hakka and Bukka. But they were overwhelmed by the forces of Arviti Somaraju and Veeraballalas of Hoyasala, and became refugees. The Hakka Bukka brothers took shelter in the forests around Kampili around 1334.

Humiliated that though they changed their religion, they could not attain any position of power, the two brothers roamed in the forests. They thus found Virupaksha temple and were instantly attracted by it. They had also the darshan of the sage born with a mission: Vidayaranya. Dedicated to the regeneration of Hindu dharma, and instinct with unique foresight, this great sage was awaiting the fulfillment of this ideal. He listened to the tragic tale of the Hakka Bukka brothers and receiving them into the Hindu fold again; he made them the leaders, indeed, the rulers, of the Hindu Kingdom, he was ardently dedicated to build. To make the two brothers' leadership acceptable to the rest of the leaders and aspirants, he made the deity' Virupaksha Himself as the ruler. He made Harihara (Hakka) as the representative of the Lord and, with the help of the enormous wealth which came with the miraculous blessings of the Lord, he got the city of Vidyanagar built with all the (7) angas, parts - (1334 - 1338). Thus, Vidayaranya is the first glorious instance of a yogi, a sage, a great scholar who, turning the wheel of political activism

in his palm succeeded in establishing the very first Hindu empire, His story is, indeed, full of wonder.

There is, however, no unanimity of opinion about Vidyaranya's birth and antecedents. Some are of the opinion that he is an Andhra, some others think that he is a Kannadiga. And many places - mainly Warangal, Nellore, Kumool, Bellary - are associated with his origins. Many scholars hold that, of the three sons of Srimathi and Mayana, - Madhava, Sayana and Bhoganatha - Vidyaranya is the eldest Madhava Mantri himself. Moreover, in the lineage of Sringeri Peetha, after the tenth one Vidyatirtha (1229-1333) and Sri Bharathi Krishna Tirtha (1333-1380) Vidyaranya, (1380-1386), ascended the Peetha.

The Scholar-in-Residence of Sri Satchidananda Bharati (1706-1741), a poet by name Kasi Lakshmana Sastri, wrote a *Guruvamsa Kavya*: history of the guru lineage. Some claim that Oruganti Lakshmanayajwa, author of a kavya called *Sita rama vihara* and Lakshmana Sastri are the same. But we do not know for certain. In the *Guruvamsa Kavya* (fourth sarga, 21 sloka to eighth sarga 35th sloka) we find the following account (here summarised) of Vidyaranya swami's history:

"An eminent Brahmin belonging to Ekasilanagara (the present day Warangal) had two sons, comparable in their splendour to the Aswini deities or Balarama and Krishna. The younger son, one inspired by the urge for renunciation left home on pilgrimage. He received sanyasa from Sri Vidya Tirtha of Sringeri and settled down in that place itself. Three years later, the first son went out in search of his brother, reached Sringeri and receiving the blessings and protection of Sri Vidya Tirtha became Vidyaranya. While Sri Vidya Tirtha is Mount Meru, the Orugallu brothers are the sun and the moon. Like Vedavyasa, Vidyaranya internalized all kinds of knowledge and wrote commentaries on the Vedas, conferring immense benefit on the world. With the consent of his guru, Vidyaranya travelled all over the country and showed his writings to great scholars such as Eleswaropadhyaya. Afterwards, he was on his way to Kasi when at Vindhya mountains he encountered a demon - a Brahma

Rakshasa - by name Sringi. Sringi gave Vidyaranya a strategy to have darshan of the great sage-Veda Vyasa. Vidyaranya recognized Veda Vyasa roaming the ghats of Kasi in the disguise of a low caste man, a chandala and prostrated reverentially to him. Veda Vyasa blessed him and invited Vidyaranya to come to Badarika forest, accompanied by Sringi. Vidyaranya did accordingly and reported to Veda Vyasa all that he had gone through: the trials and tribulations of his parents in Orugallu, the education of the brothers, and the difficulties, the going away of his brother the worship he did to regain the glory of his parents, the injunction he received from the supreme deity to undertake more severe penance, setting out in search of his brother and finding him as a monk with Vidya Tirtha Swami, he himself taking sanyas, the intention to explore the meaning of the Vedas [with a view to writing a commentary], having been able to get the darshan of Veda Vyasa. Telling all these, Vidyaranya prayed for Vyasa's blessings. Veda Vyasa recognized the merit of Vidyaranya, taught him the technique of achieving omniscience, and taught him the nature of the Form of Goddess Sri and the method of worshipping Her. Veda Vyasa also taught him the secrets of all the Tantras and telling him that by performing the ceremony of feeding the people in the name of and dedicated to Sringi, Vidyaranya will achieve all that he desires, disappeared. Along with Sringi Vidyaranya came to mountain Matanga and settled on the banks of Tungabhadra in the presence of Virupaksha. Then the childless Sayana and Madhava came and begged him to bless them with children. The omniscient Vidyaranya told them that they had no prospect of having children and gave them his commentary on Vedas and some other works. These books became famous and are elaborated as the work of Sayana and Madhava. At this juncture, the Hakka Bukka brothers who were roaming as refugees as per the instruction given by Siddha Revana, had darshan of Vidyaranya. They told him the scene they witnessed of a hare pursuing hunting dogs; and implored him to relieve them of their miserable condition."

Vidyaranya visualised the great strength and power of the Kshatria clan in the two brothers as well as their glorious future. He told them the

greatness of that place and if they could build a big city on that ground, it will become the capital city of an illustrious kingdom. He administered the rites of purification to the two brothers and made them Hindus. With the grace and blessings of Vidyaranya, and the strength and support of people, the two brothers captured Anegondi. This happened between the years 1334-36. In 1336, Vidyaranya began the project of building Vidyanagar and in that very year, in the presence of Lord Virupaksha, performed the coronation of Harihararaya as the representative of the Lord Virupaksha for the glorious empire that was in the offing.

Vijayanagar is a kingdom of dharma and its Supreme Ruler was Virupakshadeva. And the Lord's representative rulers were Harihararaya and Bukkaraya. And the acharyas of Sringeri Pitha Sri Vidya Tirtha, Sri Bharati Tirtha and Sri Vidyaranya were the givers of Power, Shakti.

By the year 1345, the empire began extending itself in the southern region. Many eminent persons of that time helped and supported Sri Vidyaranya's efforts to propagate and transmit the ancient Hindu Dharma extensively. Those persons include Pandit Kasivilasa Kriya Sakti, the follower of Sivaadvaita; the followers of dvaita (Dualism) Akshobhya Tirtha, Jaya Tirtha, the expanders of Visishtadvaita gurus Vedantadesika, Nayanar Varadacharya, the Jain guru Simhanandi Abhinavacharu Keerti. The illustrious sage Vidyaranya achieved, consequently, religious harmony among the various branches rooted in and originating from the foundations of Hindu dharma and welcomed all those who strayed away from their religion. It is because Vidyaranya inspired not only loyalty to one's own religion but also patriotism that the Vijayanagar empire shone as the greatest in the south and rejuvenated Hindu religion and culture. Vidyaranya Swami realized that for the protection of Vaidikadharma, the Kanchi and Sringeri Pithas were not enough. He sought the opinion of his guru and his blessings. Vidyaranya established in Andhra the Pushpagiri Virupaksha Pitha, in Karnataka, Sivaganga and Amani Pithas, and in Maharashtra, the pithas at Sankeswara and Kolhapur. Through these maths, those who were converted to other religion, were reclaimed and brought back to the fold of Hinduism. Because of the enormous effort of

Vidyaranya, Hindu dharma acquired strength and vitality in the south.

Vidya Tirtha, the tenth in the Sringeri guru tradition, is a great tapasi, one who did extraordinary tapas. He was always alone immersed in the practice of lambika yoga. The younger Swami, Bharati Tirtha used to manage the affairs of the math. Vidyaranya helped on one side, Bharati Tirtha in the management of the math activities and, on the other, helped Harihararaya in the political affairs. This respected sage made Sringeri a very habitable place. In place of its sandalwood image of Saradadevi, he got her image made with the five sacred lohas installed. He got substantial donations as well as all the needed paraphernalia from the king and, with that support invited distinguished scholars to Sringeri, gave all facilities for their stay and ensured that all rituals from daily worship-Nityotsava- to annual worship Vatsarotsava. All related activities and programmes were done with due ceremony. He also brought the use of the seal of Vidyasankara into all legal affairs. When Sri Vidya Tirtha passed away sometime during the period 1334 -35, Sri Bharati Tirtha became the head of the Pitha. Vidyaranya established a math in the Kedarghat area of Kasi and worshipped the linga of Chandramouliswara which he installed. (The author, visited this place on 5-5-1997).

For the live samadhi of his paramaguru, Vidyaranya, with the support and cooperation of Harihararaya got a temple built, with exquisite, radiant sculptural skill, in the form of Sri Chakra. Harihara with the blessings of Vidyaranya and the spiritual power of Madhava and Sayana extended the Vijayanagara empire to the borders of eastern and western oceans and passed away somewhere during 1354-55. With the death of his dearest disciple, Vidyaranya felt immensely sad and went, again, to Kasi to do tapas. But Bukkaraya felt the need for the presence of Vidyaranya in his kingdom and sent to Kasi his own supplication, supported by the injunction of Bharatitirtha. Always compassionate to his devotees, Vidyaranya came back. With Sayana and Madhava as ministers, and Sri Vidyaranya swami as his revered guru-Bukkaraya became the custodian and empowered authority of the royal seal for the entire southern region. The images of Sri Ranganatha, along with his consorts Sri Devi and Bhudevi, which

were disturbed from their abodes in Srirangam as a result of the Muslim onslaughts were brought back and reinstalled there with due ceremony. Vedantadesika, class fellow of Sri Vidyanaraya, was the chief guest at this ceremony. The establishment of the Hindu empire by Vidyanaraya, Bukkaraya and Harihararaya became an ideal, in future, for Chatrapathi Sivaji through Ramadasa Swami.

The Veda Bhashya, *Dhathuvritti* and other books by Vidyanaraya became the nourishing sources of further elucidation and commentary in the hands of Madhava and Sayana. This colossal work went on from 1360 to 1386. There are many books ascribed to Vidyanaraya. Among these are *Jivanmukti Viveka*, *Vedanta Panchadasi*, *Brihadaranyaka Vartikasara*, *Aitareya Dipika*, *Taittiriya Dipika*, *Dipika on Sankara's Aparokshanubhuti*, *Anubhuti Prakasika*, *Drig Drisya Viveka*. In post Sankara Advaita literature the most prominent are the works of Bharati Tirtha & Vidyanaraya. Sri Vidyanaraya mentioned Sri Vidya Tirtha and Sankarananda as his preceptors (gurus). Sankarananda is the guru of the Telugu poet Errapragada. Among the chief disciples of Vidyanaraya mention may be made of the second Harihararaya who wrote *Unmatta Raghava* and other books, his army chief Irugappa dandanayaka who wrote *Nanartharatnamala*, and Vamana Bhatta Bana who was the Poet- Laureate of Kondaveeti Asthana. The Chandrasekhara Bharati Swami I (1388-1389) and the Narasimha Bharati Swami I, (1389-1408) took their sanyasa ashrama from Vidyanaraya.

When Sri Bharati Tirtha passed away in 1380, Sri Vidyanaraya ascended the seat of Sringeri Pitha. With the help of the branches of Sringeri Pitha, he carried on the reconversion programme. But this work stopped, it seems, after Vidyanaraya. If this activity of reclaiming into the Hindu fold all those who, for various reasons, strayed from it, continued, this country would not have been subjected to the trauma of partition. The present day religious and caste politics would not have been there.

Occupying the Sringeri Pitha for six years, Sri Vidyanaraya merged in the Parabrahman on May 26, 1386. His samadhi behind the Virupaksha

temple in Hampi is a source of great inspiration to all lovers of Hindu dharma. As we have noted, Chandrasekhara Bharati Swami I, became the head of the Sringeri Pitha in 1387. Immadi Harihararaya, (1377- 1404) built Vidya Visweswara temple in the sacred memory of Sri Vidyaranya. developed the Vidyaranya pura agrahara and installed a stone image of Vidyaranya in the Virupaksha temple. When, after 200 years, the image got splintered, the then head of the Virupaksha Pitha - Sri Satchidananda Abhinava Bharati Swami - installed present image of Vidyaranya.

Vidyaranya was a sage, a great yogi, the builder of an empire, the renovator of Vaidika dharma, expositor of the Vedas, synthesizer of various traditions achieving harmony among them, a modern commentator of ancient texts, an astute political activist, the knower of all sastras, patron of music, literature and sculpture. In our history there is hardly any comparable figure who was the conjunction of so many aspect. He was a great person born with a mission. If the uniqueness of a Veda Vyasa, a Sankaracharya, a Chanakya and a Chandragupta are blended together you get a figure like Vidyaranya. He is the meeting point of the powers of jnana, tapas, iccha and kriya. (wisdom, penance, will and action).

Let us all be inspired by Vidyaranya of progressive views, blazing spirit of renunciation, whose Vedanta is not a facile cerebral exercise but became a source of the regeneration of the country and take the country to further heights of glory.

We visited this sacred place twice.

Sources :

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2. *Brahma Vidya (Vyakhyana) Simhasanam - T. Rama Lingeswara Rao*
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2. SRIPADA SRI VALLABHA (1323 - 1344)

God is the only One. He performs the three functions of Creation, Sustenance and Dissolution through the forms of Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara. In accordance with the needs of the age concerned, He assumes various incarnate Forms. When the function of that avatara is completed, He ends the avatara. However, to create the desire for liberation [moksha] and inspire the people with faith in dharma, God descends in the forms of the Sadguru. The Giant essence nature of God, descending in the form of the gurus, is called after the name of Dattatreya. Dattatreya is the guru of the gurus, the preceptor of preceptors. The Supreme guru, the incarnation for all the four ages (yugas). Anasuya was the daughter of Kardama Prajapati. Her husband sage Atri was the mind-born son of Brahma. Their exemplary life is a legend among all the stories of the Puranas. "Anasuya" literally means one who has absolutely no semblance of envy and accordingly, she was the most devoted wife of her husband. Atri was totally free from all the defects that afflict humanity. Dattatreya was the child of this couple.

The episode of how the Trimurtis-Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwara - came to test the virtuous Anasuya is a celebrated one. She transformed them into children, and breast feeding them, put them in the cradles. She described what happened to her husband Atri, who returned after some time. Atri prayed to the three gods. When they appeared before the virtuous couple in their original, splendid forms, and told them to ask for any boon, the couple requested them to be born as their child. The Trimurtis granted them the boon. The one born with the Amsa (essence) of Vishnu came to be known as Datta, of Siva's Amsa Durvasa, and of Brahma's amsa Chandra. All the three are Atreya's alone. Chandra and Durvasa gave their innate and unique qualities to Datta and with the permission of their mother, went to their respective worlds. Since he surrendered himself to Atri and became his adopted one, Datta is known as Dattatreya.

Dattatreya is the incarnate of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss, i.e. sat, chit, ananda. He is the Supreme Guru who grants the wishes of his devotees and Yoga Jnana to the sadhakas. He is the Preceptor of Kartaviiyarjuna, Parasurama, Prahlada and Yadu. His story is found in Sandilyopanishad, Markandeya, Skanda and Bhagavata Puranas as well as Kasikhanda. There are several legends about Dattatreya which state that he was born as the child of sage Atri at Anasuya Pahad near Chitrakut in Nepal; he lives in the subtle body on the tip of Nilagiri mountain, he roams in the Kaveri Valley, he is established in the state of supreme yoga in the caves of Sahyadri mountain; in various forms he roams all over the country, etc.

These are all Puranic legends. But there are also narratives which state that in Kali age he gave darshan to Gorakhnath of the Natha tradition and taught him the great teaching contained in *Avadhuta Gita* and *Guru Gita*. In the historical context, Dattatreya, it is said, gave his darshan to Jnaneshwar, Tukaram and Chakradhar. Sri Vasudevananda Saraswati described in his *Dattatreya Purana* the 16 Incarnations of Dattatreya. In his books *Gurucharitra* and *Samhitayana* Gurudvisahasri Sri Vasudevananda Saraswati Swami (1850 - 1950) described the history of Dattatreya who, during the 14th and 15th centuries, assumed the Incarnate Forms of Sripada Srivallabha and Sri Narasimha Saraswati.

Sri Vasudevananda Saraswati Swami was a contemporary of Shirdi Sai Baba. In Andhra Pradesh, he travelled to great pilgrim centres like Sri Kalahasti, Tirupati, Venkatagiri, Nellore, Manthana, Kaleswaram, Sri Sailam, Hamsaladeevi, Machilipatnam, Sagara Sangamam and Saptagodavari. In Muktyala he spent his chatrumasa deeksha (This is the customary' practice, for a monk of staying in a particular place for 4 months). This was in 1908. He showed the residents of Pithapuram (in the East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh) the birth place of Sripada and installed the sacred Padukas (images of the sacred feet) of Datta in Kukkutes wara temple. In 1910 he travel led to Kakinada (East Godavari district) and after a bath in the sea there, proceeded to Rajahmundry and. at the request of Sri Brahmananda Saraswati Swami (1863 - 1938)

installed the image of the three-faced Dattatreya and his Padukas in the Sringeri Sankara Math, at Rajahmundry. Dattatreya is famed to be extremely gracious to his devotees. Devotees worship Sri Vasudevananda as the incarnate form of Dattatreya Himself.

Swami Samarth of Akkalkot (in Maharashtra), Manikya Prabhu, Gajanan Maharaj, Shirdi Sai Baba, Tajuddin Baba, Dhunivaladada - all are held to be the incarnations of Dattatreya. The greatest gift that Sri Vasudevananda gave to devotees is his *Guru Charitra*. We have in this unique book the stories of the three mahatmas: Dattatreya, Sripada Sri Vallabha and Sri Narasimha Saraswati. Those who recite - Parayana - the great book are said to achieve devotion and liberation effortlessly. *Guru Charitra* has been rendered into Telugu by Sri Avadhuta Bodhanandendra Saraswati, Isukapalli Sanjeeva Sarma, Shaddarshanam Somasundara Sarma and Acharya Ekkirala Bharadwaja.

Sripada Sri Vallabha, the second incarnation of Dattatreya was born in Pithapuram. This is the result of the greatest punya that Andhra Pradesh did. Pithapuram is considered the Gaya of the South. During the age of the Buddha, it was famous as "Pishtapura". In the modern age it is the abode of countless gifted artists, poets, musicians, great sages and their patrons. Bindumadhava and Kukkuteswara are the celebrated temples. It was in the Kukkuteswara temple that Sri Vasudevananda Saraswati Swami installed the Padukas of Datta (1910). For the Dattatreya devotees, it is today a great pilgrim centre.

In Pithapuram, in the Agrahara area, there lived a brahmin couple, Sumati and Appalaraju Sarma. They were devotees of Dattatreya. Though they had many children, only two survived. But one was lame, the other was blind. Though the virtuous couple grieved immensely over this misfortune, they served all the guests who graced their home as the very embodiments of Dattatreya. One day Sarma had to perform the annual obsequies for his father. The brahmins who did the sraddha karma arrived and began the rituals. At that moment a mendicant adorned with danda and Kamandalu came and asked for alms: "Mother! Give me alms!"¹.

While Rajusarma was immersed in the performance of the rituals, his wife Sumati thought that Mahavishnu himself came in the form of the mendicant as sraddha-bhokta: the one who eats the food offered to the departed souls. Sumati strongly felt that Dattatreya, their family deity (Dattatreya and Vishnu are identical), himself was asking for bhiksha as the mendicant. She unhesitatingly offered food to the mendicant. Lo and behold! Deeply moved by her devotion and faith the mendicant now assumed the form of Dattatreya and appeared before her. Sumati's eyes were dazzled by the celestial figure adorning himself with the conch - sankha - and the cosmic wheel - chakra -, the trishul, the trident, the rosary, and kamandala who gave her his darshan. Overcome with ecstatic devotion, the lady continued feasting her eyes on the divine figure. Addressing the devout lady Dattatreya said. "Mother! I am immensely pleased that realising me as God himself, you offered bhiksha to me without any hesitation or doubt. Tell me what you desire I shall instantly fulfill that desire."

Joining her hands together in adoration, and gratitude, Sumati said: "Supreme Lord! Your darshan is difficult even for the great yogis. You gave me that blessing. And you accepted the bhiksha I offered. What more do I require. Indeed, our lives are blessed. Our ancestors have been blessed. Since you addressed me as 'mother', do honour that word!" Lord Datta was charmed by her resourcefulness and said: "Mother! You asked for a boon which is conducive to the welfare of the entire universe. I shall certainly fulfill your wish. You shall be blessed with a son similar to me. However, deluded by the maya of love for the son don't compel him to do things according to your wishes. Do everything according to his wish and not according to yours. Follows his commands." Sumati replied: "Lord! I am after all a human being. Therefore, grant me the discrimination-viveka - not to be ensnared by infatuation for my son. This also please grant me." Dattatreya smiled at her resourcefulness, sense of surrender and deeply moving devotional nature. He granted her whatever she desired and disappeared.

Sumati slowly recovered from the ecstasy of this event. She realised that she had violated the sanctity of the sraddha kriya. She fed the mendicant before food was taken by the brahmins who performed the ritual. And this was a sacrilege, a violation of the sastric injunctions. She immediately confessed the heretical act to her husband. Unperturbed Appalaraju Sarma, told her: "Sraddha, obsequies, is a Yajna, a sacrificial act. And the bhokta, the enjoyer, of the result of the Yajna is Sri Maha Vishnu Himself in the form of the priests who perform the ritual. Now Sri Maha Vishnu Himself came and accepted our offerings. Our ancestors and ourselves are blessed."

Pleased with this, Sumati informed her husband of the boon Dattatreya blessed them with. There was no end to Raju Sarma's delight. He realised that through Sumati, his entire Vamsa, clan, was blessed. After sometime Sumati became pregnant and on Vinayaka Chaturthi day, in auspicious hours, gave birth to a son. The astrologers who calculated the horoscope of the child declared he was none other than that Dattatreya, who is identical with Chintamani, Kalpavriksha and Kamadhenu. They declared that the great fortune which befell Raju Sarma and Sumati is similar to the one that sage Atri and Anasuya were blessed with. Observing the divine insignia on the feet, the radiance which shone on the face, and the luminous body, they named him as Sripada. He grew into a child who charmed everyone around and they all felt that Pithapuram, indeed the entire Godavari region was blessed by the touch of the tiny divine feet of Sripada. On Sripada's eighth year, the parents performed his thread ceremony (upanayana). The boy mastered all the Vedas, the Vedangas and the Sastras.

When Sripada attained 16 years of age, his father started making concerted efforts for his marriage. Coming to know about this, Sripada told his father that he could not marry any mortal woman, since he had already chosen Yogasri as his consort, thus rejection of the worldly idea of marriage. The parents tried in every way but finally, frustrated beyond endurance, they pleaded thus: "If you leave us taking sanyas, what is it that we gained

b) giving birth to you as our son? Are we to be condemned to perpetual sorrow living with your two brothers, one lame and the other blind?"

Sripada directed his gaze towards the two brothers and touched them gently. Like an iron bar receiving the touch of a touchstone becomes gold, similarly, instantly, their lameness and blindness disappeared. With this the delusion that swayed Raju Sarma and Sumati was dissolved. The delusive infatuation for their son ended. They praised Sripada as God Himself. Sripada appeared in his original, cosmic form and like Kapila who taught spiritual truths to Devahuti, Sripada did to his parents. He asked his mother to worship the divine form which appeared before their eyes. He assured his parents that both of them will surely be blessed with the perpetual presence of himself. He declared that both his brothers will be successful people in life and endowed with the eight elements of affluence - aishwarya - live long and blessed with children and grand children. He exhorted his two brothers to serve their parents as gods. He circumambulated three times around his parents and with their consent took samas and began his journey on foot to the pilgrim centers. Since Sripada became the husband of Yogasri, his name hence forward, became Sripada Sri Vallabha. (Vallabha = husband).

Sripada Sri Vallabha first covered Dwaraka, Brindavan, Kasi and other tirthas, sacred places, in the north and then reached Mahabaleshwar Kshetra near the sea in the western coast. Since Siva is in the form of Atmalinga, the self-manifest form, there, Mahabaleshwar is also known as Bhukailasa. This is an extremely powerful Siva Kshetra. This was the reason for Sripada Sri Vallabha to stay there for three years at a stretch. From there he went to Srisailam where he staved for four months. From Srisailam, he took a holy dip in Nivritti Sangam and reached Kuruvapura situated at the confluence of Krishna and Veni rivers. He remained here for some months. Kuruvapura is a small island situated in the river Krishna. It is at a distance of 20 kilometers from Mahbubnagar in Andhra Pradesh and Raichur in Karnataka. It is now called Kurugudda or Kurugaddi.

Here there are two villages by that name: the large Kuruvapura and

the small Kuruvapura. Sripada Sri Vallabha first entered the small Kuruvapura and climbing a big rock, he surveyed the land all around and selected a place suitable for his tapas. On that rock are seen the imprints of his feet. Choosing the large Kuruvapura as a congenial place for his sadhana he settled down there. Today we have here the main temple of Sripada, in which are found his Nirguna Pitha, his sandals placed on that Pitha. Nearby the Aswattha, Banyan and Medi trees are to be found. One has to travel, through Yapaladinne and Atukur villages in Gadwal - Raichur route to reach Kuruvapura, travelling by boats on the Krishna river. When there is no water in the river one can travel by foot, but during other seasons one has got to travel by boat. We had darshan of Sripada's sacred padukas on 7th March, 1997, the Mahasivaratri day. The priest there told us that in that great-tirtha, on Bhadrapada Suddha Chaviti, the jayanti of Sripada is celebrated. On Aswayuja Bahula Dwadasi, "Gupta divas", on Margasira Suddha Chaturdasi, Datta Jayanti and on Magha Bahula Padyami Narasimha Jayanti are performed.

Sripada Sri Vallabha performed many miracles in Kuruvapura. In that village a great vedic pandit and a devout brahmin and his wife - Ambika - lived. As misfortune would have it, all their children died within a very short time of their birth. Only one son survived but he was mentally retarded, a failure in life, in short, a nincompoop. Since he was the only surviving child, the brahmin parents brought him up pampering him thoroughly. They performed his upanayana ceremony when he attained eight years of age. Though they sent him to a guru for the traditional learning of the vedic scriptures, not a single mantra could he learn. When with uncontrollable anger the father beat him, his mother used to prevent it saying that he was the only surviving child. "It doesn't matter if he cannot learn anything. He is our only child now!" so saying the mother used to cry copiously. She threatened that she will not hesitate to kill herself, if he (the father) continued beating the child. The helpless father couldn't do anything except stop punishing the child.

With that grief and worry eating into his vitals, the brahmin soon died. Ambika and her child somehow eked out a living by begging. But unable

to bear the taunts and humiliations of the villagers, that imbecile one day ran towards the Krishna river to drown himself. Ambika, too, ran after him to do the same. On the way the boy encountered Sripada Sri Vallabha. He made the boy stop and gave him advice. In the meantime Ambika came running and telling her pitiable story, cried profusely with uncontrollable grief. Sripada Sri Vallabha consoled her and said: "Perform the worship of Siva uninterruptedly with devotion and faith. In the next birth you will be blessed with a son like me." Hethen narrated to her the story of Chandrasena and Manibhadra of Ujjain, demonstrating the great power of Siva pooja. But overcome by compassion for Ambika who went on crying piteously, he placed his hand on that inert imbecile, and recited the Pranavamantra. Instantly that stupid one was transformed into as intelligent as and as great an orator Brihaspati. Ambika fell at the feet of Sripada's holy feet, washing them with the tears of her gratitude. Sripada was pleased immensely by her devotion and reiterating that if she continues to worship Siva with faith and devotion a son like himself shall be born to her in her next birth.

There is another leela, miracle, associated with Sripada Sri Vallabha while he lived in Kuruvapura. Though he was the embodiment of all the tirthas, to set an example to seekers (sadhakas) he took bath in the Krishna river thrice a day as prescribed in the shastras and performed all the related rituals. On the way back to the monastery, a washerman used to prostrate to him everyday. The Swami was impressed by his devotion and talked to him. From then onwards, the washerman's worldly worries were destroyed and his faith and devotion increased by leaps and bounds. He used to clean the Ashrama premises every morning and then go for his daily chores. The Swami was greatly pleased by his devotion and one day blessed him: "You will be a king and rule a kingdom." The washerman couldn't understand the significance of these words. One day while he was washing the clothes in the river, he saw a young muslim prince arrive there, with all pomp and splendour, accompanied by pretty women and faithful servants, to enjoy a journey on the river. The washerman's mind was dazzled by the glitter and glamour of the prince. A strong

desire took root in his mind. Just then Sripada Sri Vallabha came there for a dip in the river. He understood the man's desire and asked him: "Hey you! Do you desire to enjoy the delights and affluence of a kingdom? Don't hesitate to tell me: do you desire to enjoy these things in this birth itself or in the next birth?" The washerman replied: "Revered Swami I am an old man now. Even if I am blessed with royal comforts and pleasures, I cannot hope to enjoy them - in this old age. If you bless me with all these things in my next birth, I can enjoy them life-long." Then Sripada blessed him: "You will be born as a prince in the Mridhura Kingdom. Immediately, the washerman said: "Even when I am born as a prince, bless me that I will not be away from you. Bless me with strong and unfaltering devotion to your lotus feet."

Sripada Sri Vallabha was deeply touched by his devotion and said: "You will be a prince and enjoy all riches and comforts. You will not have hatred for other religions. In your old age you will be blessed with my darshan in the form of a monk by name Nrisimha Saraswati. You will then be blessed with spiritual realization. Go now and live as you lived before." He directed a strange gaze at the washerman. Immediately the fellow fell at his feet and died. Historians are of the opinion that the place known as Mridhura is now known as Bidar or Bijapur. During that period, both these cities were in the Bahmani Kingdom. Sripada Sri Vallabha performed many miracles like this in Kuruvapura and one Bahula Dwadasi Hasta Nakshtra day of the month Aswayuja disappeared in the Krishna river. However, the subtle form even now continues to bless the devotees.

Here is one miraculous event which happened while he was in the subtle form. There lived a brahmin named Vallabhesa at Basara. He belonged to Kasyapasa Gothra and was a businessman by profession. He visited Kuruvapura every year and performed worship in the temple. One year he took a vow that if he gets huge profits that year, he will feed a thousand brahmins. This ritual is called santharpana. And it so happened, he reaped huge profits that very year. They were more than what he

hoped for. To fulfill his vow, he took out the necessary money and started for Kuruvapura. A band of three robbers scented that the rich brahmin carried a lot of money and they followed him. On the way another pilgrim appeared and accompanied the brahmin merchant. After a journey of two or three days, in a lonely spot, known as Sipanna Gundlu near Jilleru rivulet on the way from Mahboobnagar to Raichur, the three robbers attacked the brahmin, felled his head and snatched the money. Before he died, the brahmin cried in distress: "Sripada Sri Vallabha!" The bandits were on the point of burning the body beyond recognition, when Sripada Sri Vallabha, the Protector of devotees, appeared suddenly with long flowing locks of hair, armed with the Trident and sacred ash smeared all over the body and killed those robbers, piercing them with the trident. The person who was with the brahmin got frightened but Sri Vallabha removed his fear and gave him some sacred ash. He asked him to join the trunk and the head, sprinkle the sacred ash on that spot. Sri Vallabha then directed his compassionate gaze at the corpse and asking the cotraveller to keep guard over him vanished.

The trunk and the head were joined together miraculously. By sunrise Vallabhesa regained full consciousness. He got up like a man coming awake from sleep. Seeing the three dead bodies and the person keeping guard, he asked him about what had happened. The fourth one told about all that had happened. Vallabhesa realised that this was nothing else but the playful act, the divine leela of Sripada Sri Vallabha and praised him. He felt sad that he could not get the darshan of Sripada Sri Vallabha-and extolled the rare fortune of the man who got it. He finally reached Kuruvapura and instead of one thousand, he fed four thousand brahmins and fulfilled his vow. He also gave lot of dakshina. In this manner Sripada Sri Vallabha lives in the subtle body (sukshma sarira) and blesses the devotees in countless ways.

Ambika who performed the worship of Siva with faith and devotion throughout her remaining life was born as Amba in Karanja town in the Akola district of Maharashtra. She performed Siva's worship with utmost

dedication and after 16 years of married life gave birth to Sri Narasimha Saraswati. Before he left home at the age of 9, he gave darshan to his mother in its form of Sripada Sri Vallabha and reminded her of the events in her previous birth. Before he left the village, on the outskirts, he again gave darshan in the radiant form of Dattatreya and Sri Vallabha. In accordance with the promise he made to Amba he came to the village again (Karanja) and gave darshan in the form of Sripada. Sripada Sri Vallabha who was born in Pithapuram and who lives on in His subtle form in Kuruvapura is adored by all the followers of Dattatreya tradition with utmost devotion.

In the modern period, many yogis did tapas in Kuruvapura. Sri Vasudevananda Saraswati, Vennelakanti Hanumayamma, Rangavadhuta, Avadhuta Swami, Yogi Golappa, Gunavali Maharaj, Sridhara Swami, Valakeshwara Swami, Alukuru Srinivasa Sastri, Khanderao Manik Prabhu, Gajanan Maharaj of Akkalkot, Sivananda Swami, Ramakrishna Maharaj, Ashtadatta Maharaj, Prabhudas Appa Maharaj, Chintamani Swami, Brahmachari Maharaj, Kaviswar Datta Maharaj - are some among these countless yogis.

There is much variation about the details of Sripada Sri Vallabha's birth. In the existing four versions of *Guru Charitra* the dates vary. Sri Dattatreya's next incarnation was Sri Narasimha Saraswati in the 15th century. It is generally agreed that he lived from 1405 to 1456. However another writer, Bharadwaja holds that he lived for 80 years (1376-1456). Another version has that he lived between 1369-1459. Therefore, the gap between the two incarnations is 25 years. By 1323 itself, the Kakatiya rule ended. Andhra came very near extinction but somehow survived under the Musunuri brothers. However, by the passing away of Sripada Sri Vallabha in Kuruvapura, the entire region was under the control of the Muslim rulers.

A few months before Sripada Sri Vallabha gave up his body, he gave a boon to a washerman that he would be born as a Muslim ruler. He also blessed the man by giving his darshan, towards the end of his avatara, as

Sri Narasimha Saraswati. Moreover, we learn from *Guru Charitra* that he cured the Sultan of Bidar of a cancerous growth and acceding to his invitation travelled from Papavinasa Tirtha to Bidar. This was two years before he gave up his physical body. *Guru Charitra* describes, that in spite of strong protests from fellow Muslim rulers, the Sultan adhered to the path of religious harmony and, in the inner chambers of his residence gave a rousing reception to Sri Narasimha Saraswati. But the question is: who was this Sultan? If we take the life span of Sri Narasimha Saraswati as 1369-1459, the contemporary Bidar ruler must be the Bahmani Sultan by name Allauddin Ahmed Shah (1436-1458). But did this Sultan really propagate religious tolerance and harmony? It was a period during which temples and mandirs were fast becoming mosques. Thus there is no coherence between the account in *Guru Charitra* and recorded history.

We visited Sripada Srivallabha's Padukas at Pithapuram on 26-2-2001 and at Kuruvapuram on 15-1-2002.

Sources:

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3. VEMANA (1550 - 1650)

Among Andhra Yogis some are well-known either in their own places or in regions they travelled around. Another group gets known because of either their creativity, their message or the sheer originality of their impact. In the case of Vemana, however, though the place he was born and the places he was connected with are limited, his creative talent and message spread all over Andhra Pradesh. His fame penetrated every corner of Andhra. His amazing versatility has been recognized by all those who explored the Natha tradition of saints and sages. He was regarded as a poet, a people's poet, mystic seer, tantric, alchemist, knower of Ayurveda, Vedantin of Achala tradition, philosopher, rationalist, humanist, social reformer, a supreme yogi, paragon of Vedanta, Natha Yogi. etc. Many eastern and western scholars wrote about him. They formulated many theories about his personality, philosophy, time and place. Vemana's period hangs somewhere between the later part of fifteenth century and the seventeenth century. We do not know exactly his place among the districts of Guntur, Nellore and Kadapa. While some are of the opinion that he belongs to the Kondaveeti rulers of the Reddy clan, others suggest that he was in the beginning a sort of playboy fond of nautch girls who later became a yogi. Still others hold that he was born in the Kapu community. The tagline of his poems-Viswadabhirama Vinura Vema-has been given various interpretations. There are many stories extant around Abhiramayya. Professor N. Gopal did a thorough research covering information given by Abbe Dubois to date. Similarly, recently Medapati Venkata Reddy revealed the yogic secrets of Vemana's life. Professor K. Sri Rama Murthy did definitive research about Vemana's spiritual traditions, his times and place and established that Vemana was a Natha Yogi known for

certain how many were genuinely his and how many were popular imitations. There are similarities between the verses of Vemana and those of Edapati Errana, Pingali Eliana, Tallapaka Peda Tirumalacharya, Hari Bhattu and Koravi Gopa Raju. Who was the earlier and who was the later is not known. Scholars suggest that there are significant similarities between the Kannada poet Sarvajna and the Telugu sage and prophet Potuluri Veera Brahmam. The social inequalities, superstitions, the atrocities of the rulers, violence, Yajna rituals, idolatry, decadent practices of Hathayoga, corruption, immorality-and other features of contemporary society were severely castigated by Vemana. Moreover, it was the simplicity, the directness, the frankness, sharp irony and satire of his verses that made Vemana incomparably popular among the Andhras. Indeed, Vemana's reputation as a poet outshines his celebrity as a yogi. Some regard him as people's poet and some as no poet at all.

There are two Telugu savants who impel non-Telugus to learn Telugu. One is, of course, Vemana and the other is the famous Vaggeyakara, poet-singer, Tyagaraja. There is hardly any pandit or a lay person who does not know at least one verse of Vemana. Children, the troubled householder, beggar, the employee, yogi everyone has a verse relevant to his stage and status in life. In the marketplace, in the parlour, in chavdi in friendship or enmity, Vemana is universally popular all over Andhra. This is indicated by the tag word "Viswadabhirama." He was unsparing in his vitriolic ridicule of sectarian religion. He castigated both saivaites and vaishnavites as also the pseudo-tantrics and healers who exploited the gullible rustics. Vemana had experienced life in almost all its aspects and saw it in the raw among the downtrodden.

In metrical forms Vemana's aataveladi is as popular as Srinatha's seesapadya. In three brief lines (aataveladi), Vemana packed inexhaustible suggestion and incomparable linguistic compression. He was so imperious in his convictions that he declared. "It is only Vemana who could defy the dictates of Brahma, control Vishnu's canons and stood defiantly against **Siva, the Three-Eyed one.**"

Regarding the yoga tradition of Vemana since in his poem he cited Sarabhanka, Vatamoola and Somasekhara, scholars hold that Vemana is a Sivayogi and that Somasekhara was his guru. Medapati Venkata Reddy affirms that Vemana dealt with almost all the elements of Yoga such as (1) Yama, (2) Niyama, (3) Asana and its variations, (4) Pranayama, (5) Pratyahara, (6) Dhyana, (7) Dharana, (8) Samadhi, (9) Eruka (awareness), (10) Shatchakras, (11) Bhavatitadhyna, (12) Chayapurusha Yoga, (13) Swara Yoga, (14) Bhakti Yoga, (15) Sankhya Yoga, (16)Nadanusandhana, (17) Nadi Chakra, (18) Shatkarma, (19) Tantra Yoga, (20) Mandalatraya, (21) Gurusthana, (22) Omkara, (23) Karma Yoga, (24) Jnana Yoga, (25) Samsara Yoga, (26) Achala, (27) Paravidya, (28) Dharanasthana.

Citing evidence from the verses critics such as Korlapati Sri Rama Murthy concluded that he was a Saivait, an alchemist, a siddhayogi, that he was a follower of the Shiva tradition of yoga and, above all, since the poems show familiarity with the intricacies of mantra, nada bindu, laya, hatha, raja yogas moreover several elements such as "rejection of religious obscurantism and superstition, defiance of caste rigidities, repudiation of image worship, criticism of rituals such as pilgrimages and ritual baths in rivers and fasts, adherence to the prevention of cruelty to animals, debunking the snares of samsaric life, practice of mantra, laya, hatha and raja yoga, systems of nadi sadhana ..." etc. are evident in his poetry. The same critic Korlapati holds that Vemana was a follower of Natha Yogic tradition.

Considering Vemana's diction and poetic style some critics regard him as bereft of scholarship, as almost an illiterate. However, it was Vemana's aim to communicate the subtleties of yoga to the people at large who do not have exposure to the world of scholarship, he used the colloquial idiom of the common, everyday speech and its rhythms. In the language of the common people and in a manner they can understand, he expressed whatever he wanted to communicate to them. Some of the verses seem adaptation of Tantric texts such as *Kularnava Tantra*. It is

obvious that Vemana had great familiarity with texts of Natha tradition Yoga and alchemy. Often Vemana adapts in his own inimitable way transcreates verses from classicists such as Bhartrihari, Sudraka and others. This shows the incredible familiarity Vemana had with the various spiritual traditions, of the time. He knew, also, the pluralistic approach the Vedas to spiritual traditions embodied in affirmations such as "truth one, sages call it by various names".

Not knowing the essence, They create various faiths.

And become enemies for each other,

Like a dog agitated In a house of glass.

Vemana is contemporary of another distinguished Telugu saint and sage: Pothuluri Veerabrahmam. Vemana was the eldest, so to say, and Veerabrahmam the youngest. Both of them rebelled, defied and questioned the social imbalance of their times. Both of them are social reformers of rare caliber. They exposed the evil in the religious practice existing then. They propagated universal peace, prosperity and harmony. Both emphasised the importance of the guru, and the primacy of Karma action and activism. We do not know whether they met each other, but it is certain they knew each other. Veerabrahmendra, in his magnificent book of prophesy (comparable, in some ways, to Nostradamus), cited as many as twenty prophets who foresaw and told the future and among these he mentioned Vemana. He extolled Vemana in his Veera Kalikamba (The Heroic Kali) Sataka. Similarly, in one of his verses, Vemana prophesies the advent of a "Veera who would rule" the area of Vindhya and this Veera, according to some critics, refers undoubtedly to Veerabrahmendra.

Vemana centers - pithas - are established in Kadapa, Kumool and Ananthapur districts. Those who belong to these pithas wear on the eve of Sivaratri, Yellow cloths, apply Kumkum tilak / and on horses travel in the villages. Their followers beat drums. They hold Garudakambas and copper vessels. They accepted whatever they are given: cash or grain. Often they make the horses dance.

On Vemana's name, a Samadhi exists in a village called Katarupalle, six miles from the Kadiri taluk in Anatttapur district. It is now a big temple. The renowned Vemana scholar Rallapalli Ananta Krishna Sarma holds that this is not Vemana's Samadhi but that of another whose name is Tunga Vemana. However, the people here claim that is undoubtedly Vemana's samadhi. They say that Tunga Vemana came there from Patarlapalle village and used to do meditation here, and descendants of Tunga Vamsa are trustees of Vemana Samadhi. They also say that only samadhis within the temple premises are those of Tunga descendants. Every year on the first Sunday in Chaitra month, Suklapaksha, Brahmotsava is held at the Vemana Samadhi in Katarupalle.

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4. SADASIVA BRAHMENDRA SARASWATI (1560-1750)

Ever since the Satavahana rule came into being, Andhras started migrating to south India. This phenomenon became much more pronounced with the installation, by Vijayanagar rulers, of their representatives in Chola (Tanjavur), Pandya (Madhrua), and Tundira (Chenji) Kingdoms. Andhras from all the eighteen professions began to migrate more and more in those kingdoms and their asthanas. Among the Telugu Brahmins who settled in this way was the Mulikinati sect of Rayalaseema, those who migrated from the village Mokshagundam of Kamool Dist. They got the surname of Mokhsagundam or Moksha. Among those 46 eminent scholars who received the grant of Tiruvisanallur Agrahara from king Shahaji (1684-1712) of Tanjore (in 1693) was one Moksham Somasundara Avadhani. Parvatidevi was his wife. After a long time, they were blessed with a son who was named Sivarmakrishnaiah. Since he was a child they got after a long time or perhaps the only surviving child, they doted on him. This was also the reason to give him an alternative name: Bhikshu Gupta. This Bhikshu Gupta later on became Sri Sadasiva Brahmendra Saraswati, blending in his character the exalted self-realized consciousness of Suka, the detachment of Jada Bharata, and the great power of penance of Vrishabhadeva.

There are various version regarding his period. Professor V. Raghava n suggested 1750, Krishnaji Trivedi 1690,B.RajanikantaRao 1830-1887, R. Krishna Murthy 1738, Medapati Venkata Reddy 1638 - 1738. However, since the 57th Jagadguru Paramasivendra of Kanchi Kamakoti Pitha who gave deeksha to Sadasiva Brahmendra belongs to the period 1539-1586, and Sadasiva Brahmendra himself gave deeksha to the Pudukkota ruler Vijayaraghunatha Tondaman whose period is between 1730-1769, in 1738 and since this is a proven historical fact, I consider that Sadasiva's period is 1560—1750. Trailinga Swami lived for 280 years.Sorakayala Swami lived for 202 years. Siddhas obviously live for as long as they desire to.

Sivramakrishnayya was married in his boyhood itself. By 16 years, he became an adept in all the branches of knowledge. Ramabhadra Deekshita, Sridhara Venkatesa Ayyaval, Gopalakrishna Sastri were some of his class fellows in the Tiruvisanallur Gurukula. Sivaramakrishnayya was an extraordinary scholar in logic, grammar and Sruti-Smriti. He was also extremely gifted in music and literature. A strange incident took place on the eve of his adolescence. By that time itself he was immersed in tasting the bliss of Bhakti rasa. While he was a student in the Gurukula, he received the message that his wife menstruated becoming a woman. At the behest of his guru, he went to his in-law's place walking all the way, terribly tired and with acute hunger. Busy with their own work no one cared to look after him.

Tormented by uncontrollable hunger and feeling slighted beyond endurance, he instantly developed detachment from the worldly life. Dispassion towards the world welled up in him. He left the place, roaming aimlessly, eating whatever was given and began his quest for a guru. Finally he reached Kanchipuram. There he had darshan of Parama Sivendra (1539-1586) the 57th Pontiff of Kanchi. He beseeched him to give him the rites of renunciation and make him a sanyasi. The guru observed the enormous scholarship, firm spirit of renunciation and dispassion, the Acharya gave him sanyas and a monastatic name: "Sadasiva Brahmendra Saraswati." Sadasiva spent six years with his guru studying the entire canon of Vedanta texts. Thanks to the merit from his previous birth, unflinching spirit of determination, mature intellect, and continuous, unbroken sadhana, Sadasiva Brahmendra was transformed into a great scholar and a great yogi. Very soon he achieved perfection in Advaita and yoga. Parama Sivendra felt immense joy at this transformation of his eminent disciple.

In the annals of the extant Advaita literature, Sadasiva occupies a place of singular distinction. With the consent of his guru, he wrote commentaries on Badarayana's *Brahma Sutras*, Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* and the 12 principal Upanishads. These are known, respectively, as *Brahmatattvaprasika Vritti*, *Yoga Sudhakara Vritti* and *Deepika Vyakhyana*. He remembers his guru in all these works. Among the many other great texts he wrote mention may be made of *SPayoga Pradipika*, *Atmavidyavilasa*, *Atmanatma-viveka*, *Atmanusandhana*, *Sawanubhuti Prakasika*, *Brahma mrita Varshini*, *Dakshinamurti Dhyana*, *Kaivalyopanishad- deepika*, *Mahavakyartha Sadhana*, *Tatparya Deepika* on *Manisha Panchaka*, *Sarika* on *Atmapanchaka*, *Sarva vedantasara Sangraha*, a commentary entitled *Siddhanta kalpavalli* on *Siddhantalessa Sangraha*, *Sivamanasapuja*, *Advaita rasamanjari*, *Bhagavata Sangraha* and *Sutasamhita sarasangraha*.

Since the texts are in Sanskrit they are not within the reach of the common people. Recently, Telugu translation of *Yogasudhakara Vritti* and *Sivayoga Pradipika* appeared from Sri Vyasasram, Erpedu. Sri Suka Brahma Ashram in Sri Kalahasti published a Telugu translation of *Atma Vidya Vilasa*. This is a book of 65 slokas of his own experiences and is the evocation of the experience of the Brahma Jnani: The knower of Brahman. It portrays the qualities of a man of stable wisdom, Sthithaprajna written from authentic experience. The first ten slokas exemplify the extraordinary grace which Sadasiva Brahmendra received from his guru Parama Sivendra.

If these books show Sadasiva Brahmendra's uncommon genius in one area, his songs - Samkirtanas - show another aspect. The Vedantic treatises are limited to only the aspirants of Vedantic knowledge. But the songs are accessible to the common people and because of the eminent singers who sang them through media such as Akashvani they have become immensely popular. Of the songs he composed, only 23 are available to us now. Of these the first

twelve are about Saguria Brahman the absolute with qualities and the remaining are about Nirguna Brahman, the Absolute Brahman without any attributes. In all these songs, there is always the insignia of either 'Hamsa' (Swan) or Paramahamsa (The Great Swan). All these have become extremely popular and in all the Bhajan groups in the south, these bhajans are invariably sung even today.

During the days Sadasiva Brahmendra lived in the presence of the Pontiff of Kamakoti Pitha, he had acquaintance with many pandits of various countries. In that period he was at the peak of his genius, his scholarship which overflowed drowning all borders. In his debates with those pandits he was a formidable polemist and defeated everyone of them. The pontiff came to know about this and calling him he asked : "When will you restrain your speech which is enjoined to us?" He thus mildly reprimanded him for his excessive indulgence in debates. Sadasiva declared firmly: "From this instant I will remain silent - Mouna" He adhered to this vow until the end of his life. After this, he took permission from his guru and roamed, like Jada Bharata of yore, all over hills and valleys, rivers and rivulets, remaining indifferent to heat and cold, hunger and thirst, fame and infamy. When the Paramaguru heard of his disciple's higher state, he, it is said, regretted why he himself was not able to attain that state. Sadasiva Brahmendra had all the eight perfections : the miraculous powers called ashta siddhis. They were always at his fingertips. Some are recorded in the annals of the rulers and some are popular stories widely in circulation among common people. Here are some:

(I) Once Sadasiva Brahmendra was roaming along the borders of a village. A bit tired he slept keeping his head on the border mound of a field. The owner of the land saw this and exclaimed: "Oh I didn't know that even a sanyasi requires a pillow !" Sadasiva heard this and with a view to enlightening the landlord what a different kind of sanyasi he is, next day he performed a miracle. He slept in the same place held aloft in space. When the landlord saw this he commented: "Oh even a mendicant cannot get rid of his egoism!" Hearing this Sadasiva felt that God himself

came in the form of that man to teach him and thanked him profusely.

(2) Once it happened that on the banks of Kaveri river, near a place called Kodumudi, Sadasiva remained plunged in samadhi. At that very moment. the place was engulfed by sudden floods and he was buried under the sand. After three months when the sand heaps were being dug. the Swami emerged and, without saying a word, walked away nonchalantly.

(3) One night Sadasiva was seen roaming in a field near the area where grain was stacked. This was in a village called Neroor. The ryots thought he came to steal the grain and raised their hands to beat him. But they got frozen in that very posture. And Sadasiva remained there all through the night. The landlord came in the morning, realized what had happened and, seeking forgiveness, fell at Sadasiva's feet. The Swami moved away from there and after he moved there was movement in the people kept in a state of suspended animation.

(4) In the state of an avadhuta, a Jivanmukta, one who is liberated while alive, Sadasiva used to roam and once he came to Tiruchirapalli. In that state, he entered the tent pitched for a Nawab and was seen moving to the place where women in purdah were kept. Furious with anger on seeing this, the Nawab took a sword and severed the shoulder of Sadasiva. Wh the Nawab saw Sadasiva walking in the same state indifferent to the bl s forgave the Nawab and moved on. o gushing from the felled shoulder, he realised Sadasiva was a great Mahatma. He fell at his feet and craved forgiveness. Sadasiva regained consciousness. Touched the shoulder and the hand became connected as before. Sadasiva forgave the Nawab and moved on.

(5) When Sadasiva was roaming in the streets of Karur, many children used to follow him. The Swami gave them whatever the householders gave as biksha to him. He used to give them whatever they wanted and used to play with them. Those were the days when there were festivals at Meenakshi - Somasundareswara temple in Madurai. The children

wanted to see the Vrishabhavahana and pestered Sadasiva to take them there. The Swami asked them to hold on to him and close their eyes. They did as directed and instantly they were in Madurai. They enjoyed themselves seeing the grand festivals and holding on to swami, they closed their eyes again. They were back in Karur and narrated this wonderful experience to their parents.

(6) In a village in Tiruchinapalli district food was being prepared for officers who came to collect land cess. Wood for cooking was carried by servants. Sadasiva was roaming in the area like a mad fellow. They thought he was a simpleton and keeping a bundle of fire wood asked him to carry it to the place where food was being cooked. Sadasiva did so at once. The firewood caught fire. Even the hut where food was being cooked was reduced to ashes. The officials realized that they had humiliated a great saint and sage and pleaded for his forgiveness.

(7) During the period Sadasiva was moving in Nerur area, one Ramalingasastry, an illiterate, used to devotedly follow and serve him. Pleased with, his service and devotion, Sadasiva blessed him and he became a renowned Pauranik. Divine power, indeed, makes the dumb eloquent. Sastry became a famous Pauranic and their surname became Akashapurana. His descendants in Nerur narrate this event even today.

(8) The Scholar-Resident of the court of Sarabhoji Maharaj, the ruler of Tanjore (1711 -1729), Malahari Pandit had darshan of Sadasiva on the outskirts of Deepamabapura and sought his blessings for a child to his ruler. Sadasiva blessed him and gave his book *Atmavidyavilasa* as a gift. Malahari worshipped Sadasiva on behalf of his ruler and expressed his gratitude.

Like Tanjore, Madhura and Chenji, Pudukkotta was also a Tamil kingdom ruled by Telugu Nayaks. Sadasiva Brahmendra used to move mainly in the villages and forests of Pudukkotta Samsthan. During the period the Swami was moving about in the Tiruverangulam area, king

Vijaya Raghunatha Tondaman (1730-1769) had his darshan and sought his blessings for children and for the peace and prosperity of his kingdom. He pleaded that he should be permitted to be his disciple and served him devotedly for eight years. The Swami was highly pleased with his immense faith and devotion. He accepted him as his disciple and initiated him inscribing the Dakshinamurti mantra on sand (this was in 1738). The king got that sand lifted as it is, kept it in a box of gold in his puja room. This remains in Pudukkota royal mansion even today. The place where Sadasiva gave initiation to Vijaya Raghunatha has now become a famous place by name Sivajnanapura. Sadasiva instructed the king to learn the formalities of reciting the mantra he initiated him with from his own (Sadasiva's) colleague by name Mahabhashyam Gopalakrishna Sastri. The king accepted that great grammarian as his guru and did the necessary honours to him. The copper plate inscription made by the king and given to Gopalakrishna Sastri in 1738 is now a historical record. From that year onwards, the Pudukkota rulers started celebrating the Navaratri festivals. With the blessings of Sadasiva Brahmaendra Pudukkota Samsthan grew by leaps and bounds. They honored Sadasiva as their family guru. They installed the Swami's image in the precincts of Brihadamba Gokama temple, near Dakshinmurti temple. Regular worship is done there. That very year, the Tamil saint Thayumana Swami met Sadasiva Brahmendra

Sadasiva spent the rest of his life in Nerur. His desire to enter samadhi on the bank of the Kaveri, He informed the king Vijaya Raghunath, that the day of his samadhi had arrived. By his divine power, he informed the rulers of Mysore and Thanjavur. The Swami indicated to Thondaman king, the place where he was to be cremated. The king accordingly made the necessary arrangements. Sadasiva Swami told the king that nine days after his samadhi, on the place where he was cremated a bilwa tree would germinate, that on the twelfth day a Brahmin would bring a Sivalinga from Kashi and that must be installed to the east of the place at a distance of 12 yards, the Sivalinga should be installed and a temple built.

Devotees from Mysore and Tanjore arrived. On Vaisakha Suddha Dasami day, as all people assembled there as witnesses, the Swami entered the underground room got prepared by Pudukkota king and attained jivasamadhi, voluntarily withdrawing the life force from the body. This was outside the Nerur village which is in the Tanjore Kingdom. It is said that this remarkable event was witnessed by thousands of the Swami's devotees, simultaneously, at Nerur, Manamadurai and Kashi. Such miraculous events took place in the life of Avdadhuta Narayana Reddy of Kadapa - Kumool. It is said that the Swami's gross body was seen by devotees in Nerur, his subtle body in Kashi and his causal body in Manamadurai.

As Sadasiva prophesied a Bilwa plant shot up from the samadhi on the 9th day. Today it is a mighty tree. On the twelfth day, the Sivalinga arrived from Kashi. A temple was built by Vijaya Raghunath Tondaman as per the instructions of his guru. And Siva linga was duly and ceremonially installed. Today the samadhi is a great pilgrim center, attracting thousands of devotees. Their desires are fulfilled and their doubts dispelled. This famous pilgrim place has all the facilities for pilgrims coming from all over the country. Devotees gain peace of mind. The Sringeri pontiff Sri Narashimha Bharati Swami (1817 -1879) lived at Sadasiva's Samadhi for three days and with his doubts dissolved, he composed 45 slokas praising the great saint and sage. The slokas are marked by creativity of a high order. Some of the miracles that are usually associated with Sadasiva find a place in these slokas.

Since 1912 annual celebrations in the sacred memory of Sadasiva began and continue uninterrupted. On 12th February, 1996 I had the opportunity to see the samadhi and pay my respects to this great Andhra saint. The priest there told me that these Aradhana celebrations begin on Sankara Jayanthi (Vaisakha Suddha Panchami) and come to a close on Dasami. Music festivals also take place, as in Tiruvaia. Worship of the

Sivalinga at the foot of the Bilva tree is done according to Vedic rites and in the Siva Temple as per Agama rites. At present, the temple is under the government's Hindu Religious and Endowments Dept. In the years 1965, 1977 and 1995 Kumbhabhishekas took place. Nestling in the serene and quiet surroundings of a village, the Swami's samadhi though appears ven' unostentatious it is an irresistible center of attraction for devotees every where. Sadasiva is an ideal yogi, a self-realised soul, ajivanmuktha and is, indeed, a Paramahansa sporting in and drunk with the nectarean waters of namsankirtan, chanting the names and sports of the Lord. We visited this sacred place on : 11-2-1996.

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5. NARAYANA TIRTHA

(1580 - 1680)

Among, the five who propagated the tradition of bhajan, Narayana Tirtha is one. He is a king as it were, of sankirtana and yakshagana. He is a Krishna devotee of the highest cadre. The devotees of Krishna believe that Narayana Tirtha is a reincarnation of Leelasuka and Jayadeva. Devotees regard Narayana Tirtha's spiritual songs as superior to the erotic-sringara-keerthanaas of Jayadeva. That is why they are enthralled by Narayana Tirtha's spiritual devotion rather than the devotional eroticism of Jayadeva. It is no exaggeration to say that there is no singer or a group of devotees doing bhajan and sankirtan in the south who do not sing the tarangas-devotional songs-of Narayana Tirtha. Since he was a disciple of Siva Ramananda Tirtha, he is also known as Siva Narayana Tirtha.

It is said that Narayana Tirtha was born around 1580, moved southwards before 1614 and lived upto, approximately, 1680. Perhaps he lived right up to 1700. There are many yogis who lived for hundred years. Therefore, it is no surprise if Narayana Tirtha lived for a span of 120 years. There are divergent versions of his birth, and his earlier life. Professor Sambamurthy held that he was born in Tamilnadu. Malladi Suryanarayana Sastri says he was born in Amalapuram in the East Godavari District of Andhra Pradesh. Some others hold Srikakulam as his birthplace and still others say that he took birth in Sobhanadri. All these details were studied and reconciled by Tallavajjhala Siva Sankara Sastri, a celebrated modern Telugu poet and critic.

In 1982 Kona Subrahmanya Sarma published his *Life Story of Narayana Tirtha*. This biography is different from the other existing ones. He suggests the dates for many events but does not indicate the sources. According to this book, the earlier name of Tirtha was Narayana Sastri. His parents belonged to Kuchimanchi village in the East Godavari

district. Tallavajjhala Parvati and Gangadhara Sastri were his parents. Lakshmi was the sister of Narayana Sastri. During the celebrations of Vedadri Narasimha Swami Gangadhara Sastri got acquainted with Rupenaguntla Subrahmanya Sastri resident of Ginjupalli Agrahara. In the year Durmukhi, Narayana Sastri was married to Acchamna, daughter of Subrahmanya Sastri and his sister Lakshmi, reciprocally, was married to Nageswara Sastri, Subrahmanya Sastri's son.

Narayana Sastri was 35 years old when his father passed away. Later, Narayana Sastri was once on his way to his in-law's place, along with his class fellow Vatthem Virupaksha Sastri. He was caught in unexpected floods in the Krishna river. He thought death was imminent and therefore took the vows of sanyas. ("Opportune sanyas, or atura sanyas, it is called). But he survived, left his in-law's place and via Kodad, Nelakondapalle and Khammam he reached Warangal and stayed in the thousand pillar temple there. He stayed for a week with one Ravulapati Venkata Krishnayya, and eventually reached Banaras.

He took regular vows of sanyas from Siva Ramananda Tirtha who stayed in Harischandra ghat area of Kasi. This was on Pramoduta Chaitra Suddha Vidiya. And he started composing the tarangas on Monday, Chait Suddha Tadiya. He undertook a pilgrimage and travelling through Mathura and Vijayawada, he finally reached Srikakulam. There he became a friend of one by name Parupalli Tirumala Rao. When he started composing his 10th composition - taranga he was stricken with parinamasula, stomachache. But he again travelled through Vijayawada, Agiripalli, Mangalagiri, Guntur and Singarayakonda. There Palaparti Venkata Hanumantha Rao of Chakrayapalem became his disciple. Both of them travelled together to Nellore, Tirumala, Rameswaram and Tanjore. He taught in Tiruvayur the art of singing tarangas to Sonthi Venkata Ramanayya and Giriraju Brahmam. On Yuva Magha Shuddha Dasami he got the images of Sri Lakshmi Narasimha, Sri Varaha and Sri Krishna in Bhupatirajapura. At Rayachoti, one Siddhappa became his disciple and later became Siddhendra Yogi. He sat under a mango tree in

Tirupamdurti and doing his tapas, composed and completed his 12th taranga. On Magha Shuddha, Ekadasi of the Year Bahudhanya he attained Sri Krishna Sayujya: (became one with Sri Krishna) He was 42 years old. Darbhasanam Venkanna of Tummagunta village became another disciple and he later assumed the name of Bodhendra swami. We do not yet have authentic details of dates and years about this.

The surname of Narayana Tirtha was Tallavajjhala. He was born in Kaja, a village in the Guntur district of A.P. His premonastic name was Govinda Sastri. His father was Neelakantha Sastri who because of his accomplishments in music was honoured by the title "Gandharvadeva". Parvati was his wife. Even now the convention in the Tallavajjhala families is to sing about three tarangas from Narayana Tirtha's *Sri Krishna Leela Tarangini*.

Right from his boyhood, Govinda Sastri was highly gifted in music and literature. He was a life-long born devotee, like Prahlada. Blessed with unusual powers of memory, he mastered Sanskrit literature under a guru called Vasudeva Sastri. Even as a student he used to spend considerable time under the shade of a tree, alone, practicing intense meditation. Immersed in the ecstasy of composing Kirtans, he was always late in reaching school. When the other class fellows complained about this, the guru tested him and proved to them his uncommon talent. Govinda Sastri studied and mastered all the Shastras during his twelve-year stay in the gurukula.

Vedadri, on the other side of the Krishna river, was his in-law's place. Once his wife went to her parents' place i.e. Vedadri. On the very next day, Govinda Sastri set out for that place to see his wife. When he was crossing river Krishna, flash floods threatened his life. He took instantly mental Apatsanyas. In a minute some object touched his hand. With its help he swam to the other side of the river and reached his in-laws' residence. There, it is said, he appeared as son-in-law to his mother-in-law and as a great sage, Yati, to his wife. When his wife asked him about

this strange thing, he confessed to her that he took Apathsanyas, renunciation in the face of a calamity. His wife, on her part, told him about the despicable aspects of the grihastha's life in the world and the greatness in a life of spiritual quest, in such an effective way that they had an indelible impact on his mind which was already inclined towards the spiritual life. In this way Govinda Sashtri's wife is comparable to the wives of Bilwamangala and Tulsidas who played the same role in strengthening the innate urge for spiritual life. Govinda Sashti took his wife's permission to take sanyas and requesting his brother's son to look after her he went to Kasi.

In those days, a celebrated sage by name Siva Ramananda Tirtha was staying in Banaras. He saw the incomparable scholarship, devotion and the spirit of renunciation evident in Govinda Sashti and satisfied that he was fit, gave him the vows of renunciation and gave him the monastic name of Narayana Tirtha. There is another version which regards that Siva Ramananda was Ramananda himself and that he belonged to Srikakulam in Andhra Pradesh. It is said that with his permission Narayana Tirtha travelled through all south India, finally reaching Kasi. We also learn, from another version, that Govinda Sashti suffered from Parinamasula Stomachache, that he went from Kaja to Singaraya Konda and doing circumambulation - Pradakshina - to the presiding deity Sri Narasimhaswami for four days, got cured of his disease. It was in that place itself that he started composing his tarangas. He taught these taranga's to his disciples in the Addanki region and descendants of his disciples are to be found there even today in that region. Another version says that from there he went to Kanchi. With the permission of his guru Siva Rama Tirtha he went to Kasi and passed away in that holy city. Siva Rama wrote a book called *Guruchandrika*.

In Kasi, Narayana Tirtha studied Vedanta scriptures under another guru, a sage by name Gopala Saraswati. On his way to the south, he stayed for three months in Kuchimanchi Agrahara. While staying in Vellaturu in Krishna district he began writing an Yakshagana called

Sri Krishna Leela Tarangini in Sanskrit. Among the disciples who were with him and served him with great devotion, Siddhappa is the chief one. He later on became Siddhendra Yogi who is today renowned as the founder and propagator of the famous dance school: Kuchipudi. On his way to the South, Narayana Tirtha covered Puri Jagannath, Srikakulam, Shobhanadri and Vedagiri pilgrim sites. Mention of the pilgrim centres he visited is found in his *Sri Krishna Leela Tarangini*. When Narayana Tirtha got the news that the great propagator of the spiritual path of chanting the Divine Name, Bodhendra passed away he travelled to Govindapura in Tanjore district and paid his homage to the samadhi of Bodhendra. From there is reached Nadukaveri.

Among the writings of Narayana Tirtha, there are devotional texts such as (1) *Sri Krishna Leela Tarangini*, (2) Commentary on *Sandilya Bhakti Sutras*, (3) *Bhaktiyadhikaranamala* and (4) *Haribhakti Sudharnava* as well as treatises on (1) *Sankhya Karika*, (2) *Sankhya Kaumudi* (3) *Nyayakusumanjali* (4) *Yoga Sutras* (5) *Siddhanta Bindu* etc. Except his *Sanskrit Yakshagana Sri Krishna Leela Tarangini* and the *Telugu Parijatapaharana* the rest of Narayana Tirtha's writings are for scholars only. The latter text in Telugu was written for performing artists and it was dedicated to Acchutappa Nayaka (1561-1614), the ruler of Tanjore.

Sri Krishna Leela Tarangini is a vast ocean of bhakti rasa its language and its thoughts and feelings make one oblivious to even admitted classics in this genre, such as Leelasuka's *Sri Krishna Karnamrita* and Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda*. In its spiritual content it is far superior to these texts. After Vidya Sankara, it was only Narayana Tirtha who had the uncommon ability to articulate the essence of saguna and nirguna aspects of Brahman in a mellifluous way, distilling the essence of the Upanishads. Similarly in his scholarly stature and the resultant competence to expand the intricacies of philosophical systems, Narayana Tirtha is far

superior, critics say, to even Vachaspati Mishra and Madhusudana Saraswati. Sri Krishna Leela Tarangini is a Yakshagana, a performative song and dance text, and in 12 cantos it presents the Tenth Skandha of *Srimad Bhagavata* with the focus on the marriage of Rukmini to Sri Krishna. The text has tremendous variety of forms such as prose, poetry, sloka, Kirtana, and Daruvulu. There are 158 Kirtans, twelve themes or tarangas and the twelve a symbol of the twelve Skandhas of the Bhagavata. It is said that this remarkable text was performed for twelve nights and was immensely popular.

Narayana Tirtha was a great devotee and a siddha. There are many narratives current, which are examples of his miraculous powers (siddhis). Here are a few.

(1) It is said that when in a state of total absorption and devotional ecstasy, Narayana Tirtha sang devotional songs, Lord Srikrishna himself appeared in physical form to listen. Tirtha's guru, Ramananda, stayed in one hut and Tirtha independently in another. Whenever Sri Krishna appeared in Narayana Tirtha's cottage, the cottage was radiant with a strange light and used to emit perfume all over. The other sishyas became suspicious and carried tales to Ramananda, their guru. Ramananda one night went in secret, deciding to check the rumours which reached him. He saw through a hole in the cottage Narayana Tirtha singing with his whole soul poured into that and enacting the song dexterously. The cottage was filled with an unearthly, celestial light which dazzled the eyes of Ramananda and he lost his sight. Unable to find his way back to the cottage, Ramananda had to stay there itself throughout the night. Narayana.

Tirtha saw his guru in the morning in that plight and prostrating to him, elicited information about what had happened. Ramananda told him his sad story and requested him to sing to Sri Krishna on his behalf and make it possible for him to have the Lord's darshan. Narayana Tirtha did the same and when the Lord appeared, prayed to him to show His grace

and mercy to guru Ramananda. Sri Krishna appeared playing on his flute, to Ramananda. The guru got back his sight and on the spot, extempore, composed and sang a lyric with five lines each praising the Lord.

(2) This miracle was observed by Siddhanna, while his guru was staying in Kuchipudi village. When Narayana Tirtha, lying on the ground, sang the tarangas the child Krishna used to appear and sit on the belly of Narayana Tirtha and used to dance in tune with the song. This only the disciple Siddhappa could see and not his guru. When Tirtha came to know about it, he asked his disciple Siddhappa to elicit from the Lord when he would get moksha, liberation from the cycle of births and deaths. Dutifully, Siddhappa asked the Lord when He appeared the next day.

The Lord told him that once the *Parijatapaharana* Yaksha Gana written and performed, Siddhappa will have no rebirth, but his guru Narayana Tirtha has to be born again. Isn't it wonderful that while Narayana Tirtha, the disciple, made it possible for his guru, Ramananda, to have darshan of Lord Krishna, in turn Tirtha's disciple got liberation from the cycle of births and deaths much before he himself got it! Strange, indeed, and how great is this guru-sishya, master-disciple succession!

(3) With the permission of his guru Ramananda, Narayana Tirtha went on pilgrimage and reached Tirupati / Tirumala hills. At that point he had unbearable stomach ache. He heard divine voice directing him to go in the southern direction to get relief from the stomach ache. Accordingly, Narayana Tirtha moved in that direction and, reaching Tanjore, slept in a Ganesh temple in that place. He had a dream in which he was told: in the morning, as soon as he gets up, he will see two wild boars and he should follow them closely and he should stop at the point where the wild boars disappear. If he does this, the dream proposed, he will be free from the intolerable ache.

Next morning he saw the boars and also saw Vighneswara signalling to him to follow them in the direction they took. Tirtha closely followed the pigs and at a place called Bhupatirajapura near Tirupandurutthi, the pig disappeared. Bhupatirajapura is also called Varahur. (Even today one can see the Vinayaka at Nadukaveri pointing to Varahur). Here at Varahur, the elderly people were instructed, in a dream, that a great mahatma would be coming to the village and that he should be welcomed with ceremonial honours. The people of the village did the same and welcoming him, put him up in the local Venkateswara Temple. Narayana Tirtha's stomach ache disappeared without a trace. He composed a song in praise of Sri Venkateswara for his compassion and kindness to devotees.

It is said that as and when Tirtha sang and enacted the lyrics from his Sri Krishna Leela Tarangini Hanuman himself appeared and placed cymbals, and struck the tai for the song. Tirtha stayed in the Venkateswara temple and taught the singing of tarangas to many people there. Tirtha stayed for three years in Varahur and from there went to Tirupandurutthi. This is a great Siva pilgrim center which was visited by the great Siva devotee Jnanasambandhar. Music critics say that Narayana Tirtha's impact can be seen in the "Ramatarangas" Tyagraja (1767 -1847) wrote at Kanchi where he went at the invitation of Upanishadbrahmendra (1720 - 1800). Tyagaraja's guru was Sonthi Venkata Ramanayya. His father Venkata Subbayya was Narayana Tirtha's disciple. Among Narayana Tirtha's disciples, Gauda Brahmananda, Kashmira Sadananda, Andhra Maheswara Tirtha and Bodhendra Saraswati are the most important.

In Tirupandurutthi, Narayana Tirtha used to be in a deep meditative state under the shade of a mango tree. He left the body near the tree in the southern direction. He had samadhi while alive, Jeeva samadhi. This was in the month Magha (Palguna), Thursday, Shudha Ashtami. Tallavajjhala Sivasankara Sastri holds the opinion that Tirtha passed away at Thirupandurutthi which place he reached on his way back from his

pilgrimage to Kasi when he went after staying for a longtime in a village called Simamahadevi. Before he reached the place of his Samadhi, he also went to Kaja, Kuchipudi and other places. One can see Narayana Tirtha's picture in the Venkateswara temple at Varahur even today. The festival Tirtha started celebrating Krishan's advent called UtlaPanduga - continues to be held to date. Tirtha's jayanti is held for six days in Tiruppandurutthi.

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6. MANTRALAYAM RAGHAVENDRA SWAMI (1596 - 1671)

With the merit (punya) of previous incarnations as roots, Vedantic dualism as trunk, writing full of the subtle truths of Veda, Vedanga and shastras as branches, impregnable compassion as leaves, Vaishnava devotion as flowers, penance (tapas) as fruits and as the wish-fulfilling tree (Kalpavriksha) for the afflicted and the destitute, Mantralayam Raghavendra Swami's advent took place on this earth. Devotees worship Him as the incarnation of Prahlada, Vyasaraya and Ananda Tirtha. Getting to know His life and leelas is a bestower of devotion and deliverance, Bhakti and Mukti. Countless are the wonder-and delight-evoking events in his life.

The Veena guru of Sri Krishna Devaraya, the Vijayanagar King (1509-1530) was Krishnacharya. His son was Kanakachala Bhatta and Kanakachala's son Timmanacharya. His wife was Gopamma and their family deity was Lord Venkateswara. For generations they lived in Vijayanagar but after the battle of Tallikota (1565) Hindu dharma languished for want of protection and the family was compelled to move to Kanchipura Agrahara in the Chola kingdom. They had a daughter, Venkatamma and a son, Gururaj. The couple wanted another son. Deeply moved by their devotion, Lord Venkateswara appeared in a dream in the form of a ball of radiance. As a result Gopamma gave birth to a son in 1596. This was a Thursday of the Phalguna month and suddha saptami. To the child whose sublime radiance was like the full moon light, they gave the name Venkatanatha. The games the child played and the words he spoke were invariably spiritual. He was initiated into aksharabhyas by the pranava, omkara, written on the slate and Venkatanatha was asked to rewrite it. Then the precocious child asked how a single letter can be the form of Narayana, when God is the repository of all qualities, and without end or beginning. The parents and relations were amazed as well as delighted at the unique intelligence of the boy.

Venkatamma was married to Lakshmi Narasimhacharya of Madhura. A few days after the thread ceremony of Gururaja, Timmanacharya passed away. The burden of the family fell on Gururaja and, performing the thread ceremony of his brother Venkatanatha, he sent him to study under his brother-in-law Lakshmi Narashimhacharya. Venkatanatha studied all the traditional shastras and learnt the traditional rituals. Moreover he was an expert in playing the veena. Sarswati was a chaste, virtuous wife but Venkatanatha had blessings of goddess Saraswati alone and not those of goddess Lakshmi. He was reduced to such a state that bhakti was the offering, naivedya, mind was the ritual homa offering and constant remembrance of Hari-Harismarana, his food. He somehow eked out a bare living by performing the priestly duties and by teaching children. Lakshminarayana was the child born to this couple.

While they were having this hand-to-mouth existence, an officer in the neighbouring estate belonging to the legal profession announced that he was performing a yajna to which all Brahmins were invited. Venkatnatha and his family went to the yajna. Since he was an unknown, humble and anonymous Brahmin in that gathering, he was asked to prepare sandalwood paste. Venkatanatha did accordingly, reciting the Agni Sukta, in addition to the usual mantras he always chanted. When the Brahmins daubed their bodies with the sandalwood paste - just before having their food, as was the custom-their bodies started burning with intolerable burning pain and they started howling piteously. Venkatanatha apologized for the inadvertent error and prepared paste again, this time reciting the Varuna Suktu (hymn to the Rain God) and gave it to the Brahmins. They daubed it to their bodies and the burning sensation disappeared and the bodies were cooled. The official as well as the Brahmins realized Venkatanatha's greatness as a Mahatma and prostrated to him with repentance. Venkatanatha decided that he would spend his life in Kumbhakonam at the Sarvajna Madhva Pitham. In boyhood he visited this Pitham many times, along with his father. He very much hoped that he would have the sacred presence of the Sudhindra Tirtha, the Pontiff of the Pitha, and an opportunity to study intensively the literature of Madhva tradition. He was particularly hopeful

that the worship of the Moola Rama image, he would be blessed with the holy presence of Sudhindra Tirtha. It is believed that at the place, one would be blessed with the fulfilment of all the purusharthas; dharma, artha kama and moksha. Venkatanatha's desires were fulfilled. Sudhindra Tirtha got accommodation for Venkatanatha at Kumbhakonam. His daily routine was: rising in the early morning, bathing, etc., and doing sandhya, then darshan of the guru, participating in daily worship of Sri Moola Rama image teaching the students, and in his turn learning Madhvacharya's Nyayasudha from Sudhindra Tirtha his guru. With his intense austerity and devotion Venkatanatha received the admiration and grace of his guru. One day he went with his guru to the temple of Rajamannar Gopalaswami. At that time, teaching was going on in the Gurukula there and Venkatanatha explained to the students there aspects of Mahabhashya which they had never known hitherto. Impressed and delighted by his disciple's amazing erudition, Sudhindra Tirtha complemented him by conferring the title of "Mahabhashyam Venkannacharya". He also got the title of "Parimalacharya", as a result of his writing 'Parmila ' commentary on Nyayasudha which he studied under his guru Sudhindra Tirtha. Though he possessed such incredible erudition, the domestic front was extremely miserable to the extent that he couldn't afford to purchase milk for his child, let alone pleasing his wife Sarswati by providing even the bare necessities. Strange it is that such scholarship should go with such poverty.

In the course of time, a strange turning point came. Sri Ramachandra appeared in a dream to Sudhindra Tirtha and told him the role of Venkatanatha's life. When Venkatanatha came in the morning to do his namaskaras, the guru informed him that it is his duty to protect the Dwaita tradition and also take responsibility for the daily worship of Sri Moola Rama. Venkatanatha felt extremely agitated when he heard this. He thought of his wife and child and told the guru with unbearable grief that he could not undertake such an onerous responsibility. He was, he pleaded, incapable of such a sacrifice. Sudhindra Tirtha who knew the divine command, told his sishya about it and exhorted him to free himself

from the illusion of samasara. He said that he should perform his son's thread ceremony soon and absolve himself of all responsibilities.

In this situation of extreme dilemma Vagdevi appeared in a dream to Venkatanatha and explaining to him the need to restore dharma and his responsibility of preparing commentaries on the sastras, initiated him with the Sri Vidya mantra. Gradually, Venkatanatha's mind freed itself from all worldly ties. He told his guru about his son's thread ceremony. Sudhindra Tirtha performed Lakshmi-narayana's thread ceremony grandly in the Sarvajna Pitha and arranged for Venkatanatha's sanyasa in Tanjore. To convince and comfort Saraswati the guru sent for Lakshminarayana and Gururajacharya. They consoled her and finally they took the mother and son to the town. Soon after Sudhindra Tirtha got the investiture of sanyasa ceremony performed and Venkatanatha was given the sanyasa name of Sri Raghavendra Tirtha. Handing over to him the Sri Moola Rama images, the royal insignia, and the entire Pitha, Sudhindra Tirtha went to Hampi. He did tapas for some time on the banks of river Tungabhadra in Anegondi and gave up the body. His Brindavan is established there.

After his assumption of headship of the Pitha, Raghavendra did extensive propagation of Hindu dharma, and started writing of books, as well as undertaking pilgrimages. First, he stayed for a year in the presence of the Sri Krishna in Udipi. Those who saw the deep devotion and faith (sraddha) with which he did the worship of Sri Moola Rama felt as if they were in the presence of the great Madhavacharya himself. It was during this period itself that he wrote a commentary called *Tatparya Chandrika* on Vyasaraaya's *Chandrika*. He then undertook visits to all the holy places on the banks of Kaveri, Krishna, Godavari and Tungabhadra rivers. During his pilgrimage to the kshetras on the Krishna river coast, he wrote a commentary on Jaya Tirtha's *Tatwartha Prakasika*, and an explication called *Tatwamanjari* on Madhavacharya's *Anubhashya*. He established the Dwaita religious tradition on the Godavari coast. He performed many miracles on the Tungabhadra river coast. In this way, he visited holy places like Anegondi, Srisailam, Tirupati, Kanchi,

Arunachala, Vriddhachala, and Sri Mushnam. He composed hymns praising the deities associated with these Kshetras. The style is both sweet and sonorous. He propagated, wherever he went, Hindu dharma, and reached the Math at Kumbhakonam. During this triumphant tour Sri Raghavendra Swami performed some wonderful miracles.

The Swami's cook, Venkanna was a poor fellow almost devoid totally of any intelligence and, yet, stubborn by nature. Suddenly, he resolved to get married. For fun his coworkers egged him on to seek the advice of Raghavendra. He went, accordingly, to the Swami who was taking a dip in the river and asked him about marriage. The Swami smiled at his innocence and blessed him. He looked at Venkanna who was still waiting expecting something more. "I don't have anything else, Venkanna!" said the Swami and the naive Venkanna beseeched him to give him whatever he had. Raghavendra gave him a little bit of mud with which he was washing his body. Venkanna tied it in a towel as the greatest prasada he could have had from the Swami and walked away. By nightfall, he slept on the pyal of a Brahmin's house. At that time, the Brahmin's wife was having labour pains. Then before Venkanna who could not sleep, there appeared a demon, (Brahmarakshasi) who told him that the bundle with him was preventing him from entering the house and beseeched him to throw away the mud-filled bundle. Venkanna took a little of the mud and sprinkled it on the threshold of the house. Crying piteously, the demon implored him to throw away the mud and promised to give him whatever he wished for. He asked for gold and in a split second the demon brought a lump of gold. The demon implored to let her go into the house now at least so that she can eat up the child. Venkanna took, instead, little of the mud Raghavendra graced him with and sprinkled it on the demon. The demon instantly gave up the hideous form and attained a better state of existence. Venkanna went back to sleep. In the morning the householder came out and saw Venkanna. He asked him who he was. Venkanna narrated the incident that had happened in the night. Then the grihastha told him that every child his wife conceived was, every time, a still-born one. Now that the evil has been lifted, he felt extremely grateful to

Venkanna and arranged for his marriage with his brother's daughter. Even the mud touched by the Swami's hand is instinct with such power. This is the experience of one who had implicit faith and devotion.

The Swami, on his way to Pandharpur and Kolhapur, stopped at Gadag. One Raghunatharao Desai had the good fortune to offer bhiksha to the Swami. The Swami completed the worship of Sri Moola Rama and was giving tirtha to the devotees. When a lady was receiving it, a fly fell into the cup. The Swami asked Desai to go inside and enquire whether anything inauspicious had happened. Desai went inside and found that his three- year old son fell into the huge vessel which contained mango juice and died. Stricken with unbearable grief Desai's wife didn't inform the Swami about this calamity. Meantime somebody told the Swami about this tragic event. The Swami, then, asked the child to be brought to his presence and directed his disciples to wash his face and nose with the Abhiskheka water. As the disciples started doing it, the Swami went into deep meditation. Opening his eyes he sprinkled the drops of the tirtha on the child and within ten minutes the child was normal. The pooja and bhiksha took place without any hitch.

On his way to the coast of river Tungabhadra, the Swami stayed in a temple dedicated to Anjaneya and sat for the worship of Moola Rama. An untouchable was standing at a distance and observing the worship. The Swami saw him and enquired "Kanakadasa? Are you doing well?" "I am like this revered Swami! We met again. This birth is enough. I should leave finally." Vyasaraaya Tirtha, obviously, met Kanakadasa who was a devotee of Sri Krishna in his previous life. That Kanakadasa was this Panchama, outcast now. The Swami asked him: "What will you give me?" He gave a packet of mustard seeds. The Swami gave them to the cooks for use in the preparation of food. Normally, mustard seeds are not used in cooking during the four-month deeksha, called chaturmasya deeksha. But from that time onwards the use of mustard seeds during that period, too, began. The outcast gave up his body looking at the worship

and praising Sri Ramachandra. Smilingly the Swami said, "You have been liberated in this birth!"

Once during the Chaturmasya deeksha period, one Birudahalli Srinivasacharya of the Uttaradi Math gave his writings to the Swami. The Swami read them, honored him and invited him to partake prasad with himself. He was served mustard-seed rasam but he refused to eat the thing since it was taboo and went away taking only the sacred akshatas. Srinivasacharya told the sacrilege to Yadavendra Tirtha and even as he started narrating this, an unbearable colic pain raged in his stomach. The red-coloured sacred rice grains mantrakshatas - began turning black. Immediately, Yadavendra Tirtha ordered Srinivasacharya to go and tender profound apologies to the Swami and seek his forgiveness. Srinivasacharya did as commanded, and as soon as he took the mustard-seed rasam, the stomach ache subsided. The akshtas regained the original colour. Srinivasacharya was rid of his orthodoxy.

Once there were three Brahmins who were overly fond of eating. They thought that if the Swami was really omniscient, he should feed them with the menu items they were fond of. One wished to eat Payasam (farina pudding), the other chitranna (special flavored rice), the third wanted a rare delicacy prepared with rice. They went for a bath in the river and saw a disciple of Raghavendra Swami washing the ochre clothes. He told the garment-lovers that the items they wanted to eat were ready and they could go and eat. The Brahmins were surprised and they went to ask the disciple who was now bathing, keeping the satika, the washed clothes, of the Swami on the banks of the river. When the Brahmins asked him how he could know what they wanted to eat, the sishya declared that he did not know anything. [The Brahmins realised that the disciple had the power of reading the mind of others by simply touching the sacred clothes of the Swami.] Even as the Brahmins looked puzzled, the disciple took the clothes into his hand and, strangely, asked the Brahm again to go and eat what they liked. They wondered how the disciple could get the power by simply touching the satika. They realized that the supernormal powers of the Swami himself must be stupendous. They delicacies and had darshan of the Swami. He blessed the

Brahmins that they should be the priests of Brindavan and continue consuming whatever they liked to eat. It is said that the present poojaris, priests, are the descendants of those Brahmins.

Like his father Raghunatha Nayaka of Tanjore his son Vijaya Raghava Nayaka (1633-1673) was also Raghavendra Swami's devotee. Once when there was a severe drought in the kingdom, he told him about the intolerable distress and invited him to come to the capital city. The Swami stayed in Tanjore for some time and did worship of Moola Rama and as a result there were rains. When Raghavendra Swami performed Sudarshana Homa the king presented him with a diamond chain. Swami threw it into the sacrificial fire. When the king felt sad that such a valuable thing was thrown into the fire, Raghavendra Swami laughed and creating a similar chain he presented it to the king. The king felt ashamed. The Swami told him that it was with such experiences that he should mould his personality.

Once when Raghavendra Swami was in Hubli, the Nawab of Dharwad lost his son who died from snake bite. He cremated the son and with that grief writ large on his face welcomed Raghavendra Swami. When the Swami learnt about this, he directed that the son should be taken out from the grave. There was no sign of life in the boy. The Swami instructed that the Garuda mantra be repeated, and taking some water charged with magical incantations be rubbed over the chest of the boy and instructed a few akshatas be kept at the spot where the snake had bitten. Immediately, the poisoned blood began to ooze out from the body. A bandaid with sandalwood paste was tied to the spot. And a few drops of sacred tirtha (water) was sprinkled on the boy's face. The boy got up as if from sleep and prostrated to the parents. Deeply moved, the Nawab gave Raghavendra an agrahara. The Swami gifted it to the priests there, and resumed his pilgrimage.

On the way, some atheists - a handful of young people - appeared carrying a corpse. Pretending great grief, they prayed to the Swami that

just as he made the Nawab's son come alive, he should make their dead friend also alive. The Swami told them that the Nawab's son had some life left and since their friend was absolutely dead, it was not possible to bring him back to life. The Swami went on his way and the mischievous young fellows made fun of the Swami saying "Get up! This Swami cannot make you alive on your own!" But the one who was pretending death remained dead! The atheists cried in grief.

The Swami lived teaching in Tanjore for 12 years and returned to Kumbhakonam. He distributed the land, etc., there to various Maths and, with his followers, moved north towards Mysore. On the way, some of the followers went back. At a village called KalladaKurichi on the coast of Tamrapami, a decadent Brahmin, slave of all vices and ostracized from the village rushed to the Swami. Crying with repentance, he implored the Swami to save him. The Swami asked him to take a bath in the river and come back. He then made him sit very near him for the worship of Moola Rama. He gave him the tirtham (sanctified pooja water) first and made him sit for food beside himself. When the Brahmins and the people expressed their resentment, the Swami, in his discourse, told them that a person who repented sincerely and genuinely for his sins, gets purified by that very repentance. As if to show this, the Swami got a piece of white cloth rubbed with the indelible, ineradicable paste of marking nut (seme carpas anacardium). Then he sprinkled the sacred drops of Moola Rama padodaka. The tainted, besmeared cloth regained its whiteness and the Swami taught them that when one chants the divine name with genuine repentance, all the sins are washed away.

Raghavendra Swami resumed his journey and via Chitradurga and Hospet reached Hampi. There he offered worship to Virupaksha, Ugra Narasimha Swami, and Ganesha and worshipping Brindavan of his guru Sudhindra Tirtha reached Adoni. Siddi Masood Khan was the Nawab of Adoni. His dewan was one Venkanna. Earlier he was an illiterate shepherd. Once Raghavendra Swami happened to travel through Kandananthi village and performed the worship of Moola Rama in front of Venkanna's house. He gave tirtham to him and initiated him with his

own name (Raghavendra) as the sacred mantra. Venkanna attained perfection in that mantras and he was now the Nawab's right hand man. Venkanna received the Swami with appropriate honours and worshipped him in his home. Next day he told the Nawab about the Swami. The Nawab refused to believe the story that it was with Raghavendra Swami's blessings, he, an illiterate shepherd, could become the Nawab's chief. The Nawab wanted to test the Swami. He invited the Swami to his court and doing all the proper honours to him, offered him pieces of meat covered with a cloth as naivedya. The Swami meditated on Moola Rama, sprinkled drops of sacred water on the covered plates. When the covers were removed, pieces of meat, disappeared and in their place they saw fruits, and rock sugar. The Nawab's pride and distrust disappeared.

With intense and genuine repentance, and seeking his forgiveness the Nawab implored the Swami to accept whatever he wanted from him. The Swami asked that the Manchala area on the banks of the Tungabhadra river be given to him. This land was already given to a fakir but the Nawab gave him a piece of land elsewhere and gifted the Manchala area to the Swami. The Swami had a reason to ask for this area specifically. It was a place sanctified by a yajna performed by no less a sage and devotee than Prahlada himself. Moreover, it was Renuka Devi's place where she was now residing in the form of Mother Manchala. Sri Raghavendra Swami built an ashram on the banks of river Tungabhadra. Regular worship was offered to Moola Rama and the Swami gave spiritual discourses propagating Hindu Dharma. Devotees from far flung places came and had darshan of the Swami. The relatives of Raghavendra (relatives from his earlier period of life) also started staying with him.

Three astrologers from Kerala drew the horoscope of the Swami. One put his life span at 75, another at 300 and the third at 700 years. Raghavendra Swami said that all the three predictions were correct and honoring the astrologers in an appropriate manner, sent them away. He commented that 75 years is the span of his moving among people, 300 years, the span of his teaching, and 700 years the span of blessing his devotees. One day while teaching his students, he looked at the sky

and saluted it. Some who glanced in that direction, saw a luminous being, a Maharshi, smilingly going that way showing two fingers of his hand. Raghavendra explained that he was none other than the great Veda Vyasa, and that his (the Swami's) life span on this earth was 2 years, two months and two weeks. This is the significance, Raghavendra Swami indicated, of the two fingers shown by the Maharshi. After a few months, the Swami told Dewan Venkanna that he would voluntarily give up his body at Brindavana in Manchala. He showed a rock in the precincts of Madhavaram and asked that it be brought to him. The stone was one on which Sri Ramachandra himself sat for 7 minutes during his stay in the forest. The Swami indicated that this was needed for his Brindavana. The Swami gave sanyasa to Venkannacharya son of his elder brother Guru Rajacharya, named him Yogindra Tirtha and declared him as the next head of the Pitha. Diwan Venkanna procured the stone the Swami suggested and also 700 salagramas of Lakshmi Narayana and established Brindavana.

On 11th August, 1671, Friday, against the backdrop of Sri Moola Rama pooja, Vedic chanting, the sweet music of the waves of the Tungabhadra river and chanting of Hari, Sri Raghavendra Swami entered Brindavan. At the last minute, the last line of the 32 sloka which Appanacharya composed extempore, on even as he was running towards Brindavana, stopped. The last line of that 32 sloka refused to occur to Appannacharya. But something miraculous happened, the last line was heard emanating in and from Brindavana. With great joy Appanacharya prostrated before Raghavendra Swami. Sri Raghavendra is a great tapasvi, the king of yogis, and a siddhapurusha. In addition he was also a great poet, commentator, and scholar. Altogether 33 works are available which include stotras, commentaries on Kavyas, Upanishads, Bhagvadgita, Vedas, Mimamsa darshana and also writings on daily rituals and their performance rules.

In 1812 the East India Company passed a legislation that the properties of temples whose owner was not alive belong to the government. The

evil eye of Thomas Monroe, the collector of Bellari, fell on the Mantralaya property. In 1820 Monroe made enquires about this property from the Taluka officer. Monore personally visited Brindavana. Raghavendra Swami appeared before him and clarified his doubts. Those who were with Monroe saw that he was talking in English in Brindavan with someone. Since he saw the proprietor of Brindavana, Monroe sent a report to the governor that the property should belong only to the Math. As a result, within a few days Monroe himself was designated as the governor of the composite state. Monroe expressed his gratitude to Sri Raghavendra's blessings and compassion.

Another incident is worth noting. Mallappa Sindhe was a resident of Raichur. He had severe stomach ache one day and rushed to Bombay for treatment. The doctors there declared it was a gone case and giving relief was impossible. Sindhe sat before the picture of Sri Raghavendra and earnestly prayed to him for his blessing. The Swami appeared in a dream and directed him to go again to the Bombay doctor. When Mallappa went, accordingly, to Bombay, the doctor told him about a strange dream he had. A radiant, aged Brahmin appeared in the dream and told him about the way the operation should be done. He went into the operation room, performed the operation with the assistants. When the "real" doctor went and asked surprised how the operation was done, the assistants were surprised and said: "You yourself did the operation. How come you are asking us again?" The doctor realized that the Swami himself came in the garb of the doctor and performed the operation. Mallappa Sindhe was deeply moved and shed tears. After Mallappa recovered fully and regained his health, the Swami appeared to him in a dream and asked him to build a temple over Brindavan. Mallappa saw the real Brindavan which he earlier 'saw' in his dream and with immense gratitude built a temple as directed by the Swami. The construction of the temple was completed to coincide with the 300 years celebrations of the Swami.

The Swami heals his devotees from Brindavan itself. When they ran short of 30 tolas of gold for the gold covering of Brindavan, one Hari Krishna an advocate of Pune gave the required gold saying that the

Swami directed him in a dream to give the needed gold. A Chettiyar of Ramanath district took a vow that if his stomach ache gets cured, he would donate a silver chariot. He was operated upon successfully and he donated the chariot. Similarly, when the silver bell used for pooja broke, the owner of a hotel in Vijayawada sent 1500 rupees, saying that the Swami appeared in a dream and commanded him to do so. The Swami appeared directly to many devotees who prayed for his darshan with great devotion and sraddha. And he continues to give darshan. Sri Raghavendra Brindavanas are built in many places in Andhra Pradesh and he is worshipped with great devotion. We had the opportunity to visit his Brindavan very often.

Source:

1. *Sri Raghavendra Swami Charitra*, P. Sitaramanjaneyulu, 1983.

7. TRAILINGA SWAMI (1607-1887)

The world-renowned Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa declared that Kasi became holy and sacred by the presence of Trailinga Swami. He fed him with his own hands and praised him as moving Viswanath. The founder of Kriya Yoga, Yogiraj Shyamacharan Lahiri Mahashaya (1828 - 1895) had his darshan and felt blessed by his embrace. The founder of Arya Samaj, Dayananda Saraswati (1824 -1883) received his letter and cut short his visit to Banaras where he went to condemn image-worship. Vivekananda Swami (1863-1902) who roared in the west as the lion of Vedanta and made the ears of the westerners ring with the message felt that he was extremely blessed to have the darshan of Trailinga Swami.

Assuming a yogic body the Swami lived for a long period of 280 years on this earth and gave up the body voluntarily. This Andhra Yogi had all the ashta siddhis in the palm of his hand like an amalaka and was a sattwic devotee of Kala Bhairava, the darling child of Mother Kali. In the annals of Andhra his is a chapter filled with supreme wonder. Many of his devotees were Hindi and Bengali-speaking people. Swami Kalikananda Saraswati, Kalicharan Swami, Brahmananda Saraswati, Bholanath Saraswati, Tripuralinga Saraswati, Kanhaiyalalji, Mangaldas, Bhattabalabrahmachari, Mahadev Bhat, Matha AmbaDevi, Sri Yogeswarima, MathaRajyalakshmi Devi, Pravrajika Chirakumari, Sri Sankari Matha, Venu Madhav Ganguli, Vijay Krishna Goswami, Fakir Abdul Gaffiir are some among Trailinga Swami's disciples. In the early part of the 20th century itself, a film appeared on his life. The great Yogi's disciples, and the contemporary sages praised his wonderful pastimes, leelas. Even today, people, extolling his wonderful miracles, worship him ardently. Trailinga Swami Math is situated in the Panchagangaghat area of Kasi. Even before his samadhi the disciples got his image made. As in the case of Kasi Viswanath worship is performed daily to Trailinga Swami's image. I saw this Math on 3rd May, 1991.

Many people extolled the wonderful psychic powers of the Swami in

their books. Chief among them are *Autobiography of a Yogi* by Paramahansa Yogananda, (1893-1952), Swami Sivnanda Saraswati (1887-1963) author of *Yogasanas* and *Kundalini*. Similarly, Paul Brunton in his *A Search in Secret India*, Mahamahopadhyaya Sripada Krishnamurti Sastri (1866-1961) in his *Sri Krishna Sweeya Charitra*, and Poet-Yogi Suddhananda Bharati in an issue of *The Call Divine Journal* (1.1.1967) narrated Trailinga Swami's miracles. Details of the Swami's life are found in *Mahabhakta Vijayam* (Vavilla publications), and *Sampoorna Mahabhakta Vijayam* (published by Saraswati Power Press, Rajahmundry). Vaddadi Sitaramanjaneyulu published Trailing Swami's life in 1977. *Kasiki Panditya Parampara* written in Hindi by Padma Bhushan Baldev Upadhyaya contains many details of the Swami's life. There is also a photograph of the Paramahansa Ramakrishna sitting with Trailing Swami. There are many variations in these life-stories based on hearsay reports. The biography written by Umacharan Mukhopadhyay who served Trailinga Swami personally is the most authoritative and authentic one. Vasudeva Chatterjee translated it into Hindi and this is published by the Trailinga Swami Math. This contains the Swami's teachings and an account of 41 miracles he performed. The incident in which Trailinga Swami made the image of his chosen deity Mother Kali appear as a live girl creates horripulations all over the body. Moreover, we have more enchanting details of many incidents like the biography of Surdas Baba of the First War of Indian independence and the slokas written on the walls of the Umacharan Mukhopadhyaya's earlier residence. Another authoritative book is Sankamath Roy's *Bharather Sadhak*. Based on information in this book M. Anjaneyulu wrote an article for the 20th Anniversary Number of Calcutta Andhra Association (1973). All these authors wrote that Trailinga Swami was born in a village called Holia and Vidyavati and Narasimha Rao were his parents. Some say that Kumili near Vijayanagaram is the birth place of Trailinga Swami. Contrary to this the Eenadu Bangalore edition 24-4-1993 says that T. Subrahmanyam a resident of Bellary claimed in 1960 (Amrita Bazar Patrika, Calcutta) that Trailinga Swamy belonged to Bellary and his original name was Krishna Sastri. Subrahmanyam also claimed that he himself was a descendant of the family of Trailinga Swami.

Trailinga Swami's original name was Sivaramayya. A village called Holia (Kumili), in the Visakhapatnam district, near Vijayanagaram was the Swami's birth place. Narasimha Rao and Vidyavati were his parents, very well-to-do Brahmins. For a long time these pious parents didn't have children and as a result of their earnest prayers Sivaramayya was born on 19-12-1607. Vidyavati was an ardent devotee of Siva. Once during the pooja she was performing, a radiant ray of light emerged from the Siva Linga and merged in the body of the child who was sleeping nearby. The parents thought it was divine sign indicating the potential greatness of their son. Sivaramayya grew to be a serious-minded, calm boy progressively. Except with his stepbrother Sridhar, he didn't mingle with other boys of his age. Sharpness and compassion were the dominant qualities of Sivaramayya right from the beginning. Even after becoming an adult, and though he belonged to a rich family, he never cared for anything by way of pleasure and comfort. He was averse to worldly matters. His father tried to chain him to the family ties but Sivaramayya was not inclined to accept any link with the family. His mother supported him and initiated him into the practice of Bhakti Yoga.

When Sivaramayya was 40 years old, his father died and 12 years later, his mother. With this all the bonds that tied him to the family snapped. People generally return home after performing funeral rites. Sivaramayya made the cemetery itself his home. He gave away all the property to Sridhar, his stepbrother, and performing yoga sadhana in the burial ground, stayed there itself. Sridhar got a small cottage built for his brother in the cemetery itself and provided him with food, etc. Sivaramayya did yoga sadhana there itself for two decades and then cut off all his ties with the village.

Sivaramayya roamed from place to place and during these travels met a renowned sage by name Bhagiratha Swami in 1679, in a village called Bastoor in the Patiala samsthan. Together Trailinga Swami and Bhagiratha Swami went to "Pushkara tirtha". It was there that Bhagiratha Swami gave sanyas to Sivaramayya, and named him as Ganapathi Swami as his initiation name. At that time Sivaramayya was 78 years old.

Ganapathi Swami did tapas in his guru's ashram itself for more than 10 years and acquired many miraculous powers. After the passing away of his guru (1696), Ganapathi Swami went on a pilgrimage and reached (in 1697), (Sethubandha) Rameswaram. Some of the residents of his native place who came to Rameswaram on a pilgrimage recognized him and asked him to return back home. But he refused.

While roaming in the streets of Rameshwaram, the Swami saw one day a Brahmin boy's dead body being taken to the burial ground. The parents and relatives were weeping uncontrollably. The sight moved the Swami to pity. Tears of compassion dropped from his eyes. He went near the corpse, took some water from his water-pot, uttered some mantras and sprinkled it on it. Immediately the Brahmin boy came back to life. The gathering praised Trailinganga Swami as the Lord Ramalingeswara himself. As news of the miracles performed by the Swami spread far and wide, he left the place and reached Sudhamapuri after two years.

From there in 1710 he reached the dense forests of Nepal. A miracle took place during this period when the Swami was doing intense penance in the forests. A royal personage came to the forest for hunting the tigers and a tiger which escaped his rifle shot, ran to the Swami immersed in tapas and sat at his feet. The royal personage was dumb struck with wonder witnessing this strange scene. Seeing him the tiger roared and it disturbed the Swami's meditation. He opened his eyes and seeing everything raised his hand. It was a hand that extended protection to the tiger and a command to the hunter to desist from killing it. The Swami's message was that those who cannot give life are not entitled to take it away. The royal relative went back to Kathmandu and told the king about the strange incident. The king came down from Kathmandu and paying his respects to him offered him royal gifts. Swami didn't even touch them and telling him that cruelty to animals is not desirable, he gave initiation (deeksha) to the king. Hearing from the servants of the king the wonders that the Swami performed, people began flocking to him in great numbers. His solitude thus affected, Trailinganga Swami left the place and entered Trivishtapa (Tibet) in 1707 and did yoga sadhana at

many places. In the same year the Swami reached the region of Manasarovar. There he saw a widow weeping over her 5-year-old son who died from snakebite. Trilinga Swami restored life to the boy by his holy touch. People who saw this miracle hailed the Swami's greatness, surrounding him. They saw the Swami disappear from their midst and walking away in the mountain valley.

Doing penance in this way for a long time in the Himalayas, in 1726 Trilinga Swami reached a great center of holiness and penance, Markandeya Ashrama on the banks of river Narmada. Great Yogi Khaki Baba did day and night strenuous tapas here itself on the bank of Narmada. Khaki Baba is an extraordinary sadhu of great miraculous powers. He was worshipped, by the people of the area, as a great sage. He got a glimpse of Trilinga Swami's greatness one day when he witnessed an extraordinary scene. One day, in the early morning, Khaki Baba saw the Narmada river flowing with milk and Ganapati was drinking the milk in large quantities. But when Khaki Baba wanted to drink the milk himself, it turned to water. Khaki Baba told this incident to the other yogis in his ashram. People realized the greatness of Trilinga Swami and that was enough reason for him to leave the place. For seven years he roamed here and there and in 1733 reached Prayag. One day when he was sitting immersed in samadhi on the banks of the river, it began to rain heavily accompanied by thunder and lightning. His follower Ramtaran Bhattacharya suggested that they should move to the nearby choultry. The Swami didn't move. On the contrary, he showed a boat that was sinking far away in the river and said that he had to protect the boat. Even as Ramtaran saw the boat was sinking further and further. In the meantime Ganapathi Swami appeared on the sinking boat and took all the passengers safely to the river shore. The Swami's fame spread far and wide. The attendant, Ramtaran Bhattacharya, asked the Swami about those powers (siddhis). Swami told him that a great power lies imbedded in everyone and few people recognize and fewer, even when they recognize, put it to proper use. He also said that men are becoming unnatural not knowing about this natural power. These siddhis or powers are quite natural and not extraordinary as people tend to believe.

Ganapati Swami left Prayag in 1737, in the month of Magha, and reached Varanasi. Varanasi, one of the most sacred places and is renowned as the final destination of all yogis and the abode of Siva, Anandakananam. Ganapati Swami reached Varanasi when he was 130 years old and stayed in Varanasi for a period of another 150 years. The Swami did the practice of yoga at many ghats on the river Ganges in Kasi. With a body of 300 pounds in weight, naked, wearing rudraksha, with a pot belly, he was indeed a sight in Varanasi. People called him "Mobile Viswanatha". Like a royal swan the Swami floated on the river for hours together. And for hours together he used to live in the depths of the sacred river. People used to watch him from the shore. The Swami's first place of stay was the garden of Tulsidas near Asighat. There one Brahma Sinha deaf and stricken with leprosy lay on the ground groaning with acute pain. The Swami touched him and asked him to go to the Lolarkakund, have a dip in that and after coming to wear a bilwa leaf which he gave him. Sinha did exactly what the Swami told him and the disease disappeared. He became now the Swami's follower. The Swami reached Vedavyasa Ashrama, from there. He freed Sitanath Bandopadhyaya from tuberculosis and reached Hanuman Ghat.

There a Maharashtrian woman stayed with her sick husband and used to go and worship Lord Kasi Viswanath for the restoration of her husband's health. She saw the new naked Swami who came there and felt disgusted. She abused him saying that he should have stayed in forests and not roam naked among people like this, that too, before women. The Swami disregarded that abuse. Visweshwara (Kasi Viswanath) appeared to her in a dream and told her that only when she took refuge in the naked Swami will her husband's illness be cured. Her husband was sick with a terminal (peptic) ulcer. Not finding any alternative, she went to the naked Swami and sought his forgiveness, imploring him to cure her husband of the fatal illness. The Swami, moved by pity, gave her Vibhuti. Her husband's ulcer disappeared. The Swami left that place and went to Dasaswamedh Ghat. One Mishra, son of Sivaprasad, a resident of Rampur, was stricken with paralysis and with his sacred touch and piteous

looks the Swami gradually cured Mishra's paralysis. He became a disciple of the Swami.

News of the Swami's extraordinary powers and the miracles he did spread all over Varanasi. Crowds and crowds of people poured into see the Swami from Annapurna Ghat, Visweswara Ghat, Hali Ghat, and other places. Some came stricken with disease and seeking cure, some with simple curiosity and some with a genuine desire for a spiritual life. The devotees brought various delicacies, for the Swami to eat. One devotee made the Swami eat half a mond of prasad. Kasi receives people of different languages and regions, and those who visit include pilgrims, scholars and students. There is also a street where Telugu people live. Several eminent scholars from Jagannatha Panditaraya to Manavalli Gangadhara Sastri stayed in Kasi. The Kasi Pandits recognized that the Swami was a Telugu. From that time onwards he was called Trailinga Swami. Gradually, the name Ganapathi Swami receded and "Trailinga Swami" remained. In 1800 the Swami moved his stay from Dasaswamedh Ghat to Bindu Madhav in Panch Ganga Ghat. From then on until his mahasamadhi, he observed silence. For anything he needed or for giving answers to questions put to him, the Swami used signs, and gestures. As a result, some people used to call him Mouna Baba. A Maharashtrian lady Amba Devi, prepared food for him. Her sons, Mangaldas and Krishna Prasad served him devotedly, as his constant attendants. They used to explain and interpret the Swami's gestures. On walls near the altar on which the Swami slept some slokas in Sanskrit script were written. The Swami showed some of the slokas to visitors and Mangaldas interpreted them so that the doubts of the devotees, pandits, etc., were clarified. For seekers, the Swami gave 20-30 manuscripts for consultation.

As we saw, Trailinga Swami performed many miracles, - his leelas or playful pastimes-in Kasi. Once the Maharaja of Ujjain, was taking a boat ride along with his followers, in the Ganga. He saw the Swami sitting in Padmasana pose on the waves of the Ganga placidly, like a royal swan, and was struck with wonder. His followers told him about the great Swami. The king invited the Swami to his boat with due honors.

The Maharaja wore on his waist a diamond-studded sword which was a gift from the British rulers. The sword fascinated the Swami. Observing this, the Raja gave it off to the Swami. While he was observing the sword with great curiosity, the sword slipped from the Swami's hands and fell into the Ganga. The Maharaja became furious and abused the Swami. The Swami dipped his hand into the waters and taking out two identical swords, showed them to the Raja asking him to take his. The Raja was confused and unable to identify his sword. The Swami asked him how he could recognize his citizens, when he failed to identify his own personal sword. Then the Swami gave the original sword to the Raja and threw the other one again into the waters. The Raja sought his forgiveness and purifying him the Swami jumped into the Ganga and disappeared. Dumbstruck with wonder, the Raja simply watched this.

Some Britishers and their wives didn't like the Swami roaming naked in the streets of Kasi. It was repulsive to them. They informed the Magistrate of the city who was also a Britisher. He instructed the police to catch the Swami and bring him to the court. Accordingly they "captured the Swami, abused and beat him and forcefully brought him to the court. The Swami neither spoke nor responded in any way. He didn't reply to any of the questions asked by the advocate or even the judge. One Sub-magistrate and some advocates recounted some of the miracles performed by the Swami. They said that the Swami is a detached sage who had an attitude of equality of all and was totally devoid of any consciousness of the body. The magistrate who heard everything asked whether the Swami would eat meat which was his own food. The Swami's gestures conveyed his willingness to eat meat but asked whether the magistrate would eat whatever he (the Swami) himself ate. Then he discharged faeces from his anus on to his hand and showing it to the magistrate put it in his mouth. The Court hall was filled with the smell of sandalwood paste. The magistrate who witnessed the powers of the Swami with his own eyes and realised he was in the presence of an extraordinary spiritual personage, ordered that the Swami could move about in the city freely and none should interfere with his freedom in any way.

One day when the Swami was moving about in the streets, a mischievous boy pulled at his penis and tried to stretch it. Seeing that it stretched itself to a few yards, the boy was terrified and ran away. Some miscreants brought lime water as milk in a big bucket, the Swami drank it with ease and teaching them a lesson, passed the entire thing as urine. Once when the Swami was walking before the palace of the Raja of Vijayanagar, the Raja recognised him and inviting him respectfully inside, presented him with new clothes and gold ornaments and bade him farewell. Then some robbers saw the ornaments and stole the entire lot. The Raja caught hold of the thieves and asked the Swami what punishment he should give them. The Swami declared that he does not need any ornaments and asked that the thieves be forgiven. Forgiveness, he declared, is itself punishment. What does the naked renunciate require of the world. For him gold is clay.

When Sri Ramakrishna came to Banaras, he had darshan of the Swami, along with Hridayanath, his nephew. The Swami welcomed the Paramahamsa cordially, made him sit beside himself and offered a box of snuff in honour of the guest. The great Master, pointing to the Swami told his nephew that Trailinga Swami as a moving Lord Viswanatha. Sri Ramakrishna visited him again and fed him farina pudding with his own hands. The Paramahamsa asked the Swami whether Ishwara is One or Many. Through gestures the Swami communicated the answer: God is one when one is in samadhi and He is many when one is aware of and in the world. The Paramahamsa pointed the Swami to his nephew and said: "This is exactly the state of the Paramahamsa." The Paramahamsa again invited the Swami to his lodgings and honored him in a grand manner. I saw this place in Kedarghat on 3rd May, 1997.

Since Sri Ramakrishna honored the Swami though he was not in favour of doing any miracles, performed through siddhis, it is obvious that there are something special in the Swami, something extraordinary beyond the miracles. The Swami did not do miracles to exhibit his greatness or from a streak of exhibitionism. They are symbols and examples of his infinite pity and compassion. They must be considered as his responses

to the suffering of people as also miracles to open the eyes of those arrogant people who were blinded by pride. This is the reason why the Swami never approved the miracles performed by the founder of the Theosophical Society, Blavatsky and Alcot, in Mumbai. In 1874, the disciple of Prithvigiri by name Vidyananda Swami, - a codisciple of the Swami, also came for his darshan, learning that the Swami was residing in Varanasi. When he went to see the Swami, he was surrounded by his devotees and disciples. The Swami was sitting there when he saw Vidyananda, the Swami got up with respect and embraced him. They remained like that for a long time and suddenly disappeared from amidst the gathering. All of them waited like that for half an hour. Then only the Swami returned. He told them that he took his codisciple to Rajaghat, gave darshan to the people who were there and came back. The Swami's laying off of his incarnate body is also a wonderful incident. The Swami informed Umacharan Mukhopadhyaya, his biography of this future event, six years earlier. After six years, one day, the Swami had an outing on the Ganga water and sported for as long as he liked and felt totally satisfied. He returned and suddenly told his followers that he had decided to give up his body and asked them to bid farewell to him. The trusted servant Mangal Das who served the Swami for 32 years burst into tears at this news. And weeping uncontrollably, he requested the Swami to give some more time, so that, for the worship of devotees in future, a stone image of the Swami could be made. The Swami acceded to his request and gave him one month's time. The followers informed the devotees living far away about the Swami's decision to give up his body. Umacharan who was working in Golaghat in Assam rushed to Varanasi, to the Swami's presence. Similarly, Bholanath, Sadanand, Brahmanath, Kali Charan and other devotees and disciples rushed to the have darshan of the Swami. Ten days before his samadhi, Trailinga Swam selected a place in the Panchaganga Ghat area and got an underground cell prepared there. On the tenth day, between 8 and 9'0 clock in the morning, he entered the underground cell and got the door closed. He told them that under no circumstances should the door be opened, until

he himself knocked on it. In the meantime, the Swami's image made with black stone was ready.

The Swami remained in Yogasamadhi and at 3'0 clock in the afternoon, on his own he came out. He bid farewell to all. He taught by gestures only the essence of his message. He received arathi and other rituals. Again he sat in a yogic posture and that very evening piercing the Brahmarandhra merged into the Cosmic consciousness. On 26 December, 1887, rung down the curtain on his life drama. As per his instructions, the devotees kept the body in a wooden chest, locked it, and took it in procession from Asighat to Varuna and at the stipulated place consigned it to the sacred waters of Mother Ganga. Thousands of people gathered and paid spontaneous homage to this spiritual stalwart and felt blessed to witness the last act in this divine drama. From that day onwards, in the Swami's Math, Pooja is being done uninterruptedly. We also have the picture of Paramananda Swami, the son of Trailinga Swami's step - brother Sridhar in the Math. Experts on Yoga hold that Trailinga Swami is the greatest example of all the ashtasiddhis, mentioned in the "Vibhuti Pada" of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras. Recently the biography of Trilinga swami by Umacharana Mukhopadhyaya is translated and published in Telugu. We visited this shrine on 3-5-1997.

Sources:

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8. POTHULURI VEERA BRAHMENDRA SWAMI (1608-1693)

Yoga is the quest (sadhana) for the experience of union with Brahman. It is of various forms such as Hatha, Raja, Swara, Mantra and Laya Yogas. There are some who practised one or two or three forms. But Veerabrahmendra is the one who achieved Mahayoga - or the greatest union-which blends all these forms of yoga. Some achieve siddhis or miraculous powers within a short time, some after long practice. But Veerabrahmendra is the Mahayogi who had these powers at birth itself. Some swara yogis achieved knowledge of the three dimensions of time - past, present and future-called thrikala jnana and showed these powers to a limited extent. There were yogis who were gifted with kalajnana, or omniscience of whatever is to happen. But among those who foretold the future extensively Veerabrahmendra is foremost. Veerabrahmendra's life is at every step a mine of miracles; at every turn a heap of wonders. It is a typical Andhra saying that there is no yogi like Vemana, no guru like Veerabrahmendra and no disciple, sishya like Siddhayya.

Veerabrahmendra's period and his birth and parentage are not known with certainty. Traditionally, it is held that he was the son of Paripoomacharya (the complete one) Prakritamba (Mother Nature) but was brought up by the head of Nandikonda Papaghni Peetha, Veerabhajacharya and his wife Veerapapamba. They were goldsmiths by caste, also called "Viswabrahmanas". The Papaghni Math is near Nandikonda in Chikkaballapuram taluk of Kolar district. The couple Yanamadala Veerabhajacharya and Veerapapamba named their God-given child as Veerabhajathayya and brought him up with great affection. By the age of 13 itself Veerabhajathayya was a master of all disciplines. In the meantime Veerabhajacharya died. Veerabhajathayya consoled his mother and initiating her into the path of salvation, told her the evolution of the pinda, and the fourteen stages of the jeeva, living being. He also

taught her the Sankhya, Taraka and Amanaska forms of yoga and, what is more, gave her a darshan of his Cosmic Form. When he undertook, with the permission of his mother, a pilgrimage he ran into a prince called Ananda Singh who, repenting over the sin of slaughtering a cow, became a yogi, Ananda Bhairava Yogi. Veerambhotlayya initiated him into the Dwadasi mahamantra and also the method of revoking the sin he committed. Ananda Bhairava Yogi was born in the next life as Doodekula Siddhayya and became the foremost-among Brahmendra's disciples. Veerambhotlayya, in the course of his wandering, reached, Banaganapalle in the Karnool district.

In Banaganapalle village there was a great jnani, a woman by name Garimireddy Acchamma. She had lots of cattle. Veerambhotlayya worked for her as a shepherd. From now onwards, he was known as Veerappayya. His daily routine, was to take the cows for grazing in the fields on Rawalakonda (Konda : mountain, hillock) during the day and bring them back in the evening. He used to make the cows graze in the forest and around the flock he used to draw a circle so that they would not stray from the fold. Then Veerappayya used to go in to a cave situated in Rawalakonda and sitting there used to write leaves of "Kalajnana" foretelling the future. Palmleaves of this he kept concealed in the cellars belonging to Acchamma. The cows remained confined to the circle he drew. They never stepped beyond the line. The cows of other cowherd boys always remained lean and emaciated, though they grazed quite sumptuously. The cows staying within the circle drawn by Veerappayya appeared strong, well-fed and yielded plenty of milk. Hearing about this, Acchamma went secretly to the place and saw the cows in the circle and Veerappayya in the cave. She saw the cave filled with a radiant light and realized that he was an extraordinary boy. She went back. When Veerappayya returned with the flock she praised him and craved his forgiveness. Veerappayya took Acchamma to Yagantiswara temple and in a solitary place, initiated her into the Dwadasakshari mantra. He narrated to her several details through his foretelling which are destined to happen after 4808 years of Kali Yuga. They returned home and as

usual, he hid the leaves of Kalajnana (book of prophesies) in the cellar. Acchamma realized Veerappayya's greatness and stopping him from the shepherd's job, got a special Math with the name "Lomatham" for his spiritual practices. And on the palm leaves, after some days, a tamarind tree took root. They say it is there to date. Veerappayya stayed with Acchamma for 12 years.

When Veerappayya started living in Lomatha and instructed the devotees in the nature of self-realization, a Brahmin sadhaka by name Annajayya, came to see him. Veerappayya taught the second Aswasa (chapter, section) of his Kalajnana and initiated him into the Sivpanchakshari and Narayanashtakshari mantras. It is this great disciple Annajayya who propagated the great teachings of Kalajnana and made them widely known. Veerappayya cured Acchamma's son Brahmananda Reddy of his blindness he was stricken with in his middle age. Veerappayya told that the blindness was the result of bad Karma in the past life. When Veerappayya's psychic and occult powers became widely known, they attracted the attention of the Nawab of Banaganapalli and he wanted to test them himself. He invited Veerappayya cordially to his estate with all the honours and as part of this offered him meat dishes, carefully covered by a cloth. Veerappayya transformed them into flowers and taught a lesson to him. The Nawab realized his greatness and prayed for his forgiveness. Veerappayya taught Kalajnana to the Nawab. The Nawab gifted some land to the Lomatham the income on which was to be spent on the worship of the deities and other things. Veerappayya handed over the math to Acchamma, Brahmananda Reddy and Annajayya and went to Kandimallayyapalle.

The village Kandimallayyapalle is situated in Badwel taluk of Kadapa district. Veerappayya settled there and used to do carpentry, and blacksmith work. Alongside he used to teach spiritual matters to the villagers. In this way he became extremely popular in the village. There was Pedakomerla village where lived a virtual, God-fearing goldsmith by name Sivakotayya. He had a daughter Govindamma, born with the blessings of the Divine Mother, Parameswari. The parents looking for a

groom faced a strange situation. Govindamma declared firmly that only a person born with the amsa (quality) of Narayana will be her husband. Even though well-past the marriageable age, she refused to marry. Meanwhile, Veerappayya during his pilgrimage of sacred places, came to Pedakomerla and stayed in the temple. When a Reddy gentleman of that village died, and his dead body was being taken to the burial ground, Veerappayya who saw it, declared that the Reddy was not dead. He sprinkled some vibhuti (sacred ash) on the body and restored life. Relatives of Reddy who saw this miracle began worshipping Veerappayya as an incarnation of God. Some mischievous people refused to believe this. They made one of them lie on the bier (funeral pile) and declaring him as dead, challenged Veerappayya to restore him to life. Veerappayya who realised their mischief declared that the man was dead and there was no question of his coming back alive. The miscreants tried desperately to wake him up but realized, to their shock, that he was really dead. They fell at the feet of Veerappayya asking him to forgive them and bring him back to life. Veerappayya took pity on them and with his touch the corpse was restored to life. For the curious and spiritually inclined people there, Veerappayya read out from the Kalajnanam portions relating to 5000 years after the advent to Kaliyuga. Sivakotayya who saw these miracles, directly, gave Govindamma in marriage to Veerappayya. The newly married couple then moved to Kandimallayyapalle. From now onward, he was known as Veerabrahmam.

Veerabrahmam and Govindamma undertook now a tour to pilgrim centers in north India and completing it they reached Srisailam and from there went to Banaganapalle, visited Lomatham and went back to Kandimallayyapalle. The devotees there, constructed a Math for Veerabrahmam. He fulfilled the wishes of his devotees and taught them spiritual knowledge. In course of time the couple had five sons and one daughter. The sons: (1) Siddhalingayya (2) Govindayya (3) Sivaramayya (4) Pothulurayya and (5) Omkarayya. The daughter's name was Veeranarayanamma. The first-born son Siddhalingayya was adopted by the maternal grandparents and moved there.

About 8 miles from Kandimallayyapalle, in a remote village called Mudumala, there lived a couple by name Peer Sahib and Adambi. They belonged to the Muslim sub caste which specialized in spinning cotton, etc., to prepare beds and pillows (Dudekula, in Telugu) With the grace of God and Muslim Saints a son was born to them. Shaikh Saheb was his name. It was this person who became a remarkable Yogi creating history. He was known as Siddhayya. Siddhayya was a great devotee right from his birth and endowed with all divine qualities. At the age of 15 when his spiritual hunger became intense, he went to Kandimallayyapalle and became Veerabrahmendra's disciple. But the latter's sons - Govindayya and Pothulurayya prevented the Muslim boy from entering the Math. Veerabrahmendra who looked upon all as embodiments of God, reprimanded his children and accepted Siddhayya as his disciple. Though the parents came and put a lot of pressure, Siddhayya refused to go back. Veerabrahmendra tested Siddhayya's faith in and devotion to the guru and finding him fit, initiated him into Brahmajnana, Tarakayoga and taught him the Panchamudras.

Veerabrahmendra travelled through Rayalaseema, Costal Andhra and Telangana, finally reaching the twin cities of Hyderabad-Secunderabad. There he assembled all the Viswabrahmanas and taught them lakshya traya, the traid of bahya, madhya and antarlakshya. He showed his eminence by lighting a lamp with fresh water in the royal court of the Hyderabad Nawab. He foretold the Nawab's future. After this, Veerabrahmendra started on his return journey. He sensed that his disciples became jealous about Siddhayya since he showed special love and affection to him. Veerabrahmendra wanted to demonstrate Siddhayya's unparalleled devotion to the guru. On the way he showed the disciples a dead dog. The body was rotten and worms were crawling all over its body. The Swami asked the other disciples to eat the dead dog. Startled, they all shrank in horror. Siddhayya came foreword and ate the carcass like Payasam (farina pudding). The other disciples were humbled and their pride, envy and other qualities crushed to pieces. Veerabrahmendra felt happy with his disciple's devotion to the guru. As

the Swami was going further along on his pilgrimage, he saw under the shade of a tree a Pushpagiri Brahmin couple crying inconsolably. The Swami learnt about the reason, cured the Brahmin of leprosy and initiated the couple into diksha.

Veerabrahmendra along with his disciples worshipped Veerabhadraswami in Allatapalle and reached later, Kandimallayyapalle village. He told Siddhayya about reincarnation (Punarajanma) and freedom from birth. In the meantime he got a memo from the Nawab of Kadapa complaining against his conversion of the Muslim Shaikh Saheb into Hindu Siddhayya. Siddhayya went to Kadapa, taught Advaita Philosophy to the Muslims, and exhibited his powers in the Nawab's court. When the Nawab became angry that Siddhayya didn't do namaskar to him, Siddhayya did that to a black stone and it broke into pieces. Siddhayya thus demonstrated that except his guru none else can bear the power of his salutations and receiving the honors that the Nawab did to him, he returned to the presence of his guru. One day Veerabrahmendra taught, at Siddhayya's plea, the secrets of the six centers or pluxes called shatchakaras in the body, Kakkayya an outcast madiga, heard it in hiding. Kakkayya wanted to see the presiding deities of the shatchakars, and with that intention tore open the stomach of his sleeping wife. Kakkayya cried hoarse and, returning to the guru began shouting that the guru told blatant lies and, as a result, he did something heinous. He cried and cried about his misdeed. Veerabrahmendra felt great compassion for him. He then went to Kakkayya's place, showed him the presiding deities of the different charkas in his wife's body and brought her back to life.

Once the Swami was on his way to Nandyal. As he neared a village called Diguvametta, he felt thirsty. He asked a blacksmith to give him some water. Annoyed that his work got disturbed, he offered to the Swami a crucible filled with liquid iron. The Swami drank the liquid fast and thus showing his powers reached Nandyal. People belonging to the other castes came and worshipped the Swami. But the Viswabrahmins did not come at all. The Swami, by way of punishing them so that they were taught a lesson, made his disciple Siddhayya eat the entire mound of food prepared there.

The humiliated Nandyal Viswabrahmins fell at the feet of the Swami and sought his forgiveness. The Swami taught them many spiritual things as well as revealing details about their gothra, pravara, etc. On his way to Ahobilam, the Swami punished a demon and gave him a clue to get rid of a curse which made him a demon. As soon as the Swami reached Kadapa, the Nawab wanted to test him and ascertain his greatness. The Swami told him about the male child that the Nawab's pregnant horse was carrying and showed him the young one lying in the womb. The Nawab understood the greatness of the Swami and honoured him in a grand way. The Swami taught him secrets imbedded in Kalajanana.

The Swami punished the robbers who wanted to plunder the entourage travelling between Kadapa and Pushpagiri and taught them an honest way of life which alone makes as human beings. When he was travelling through the main street of Pushpagiri Agrahara (Brahmin ghetto), some of his followers were reciting the Vedas and some others were reciting Upanishads. The Brahmins of the Agrahara found this highly objectionable. The Swami explained to the Brahmins the origins of the caste system and its antecedents, and proved that all people are entitled for the study of the Vedas. Even then the Pushpagiri Brahmins did not allow the Swami's carriage to move forward; the Swami showed them the scene of Pushpagiri Agrahara in flames. The Brahmins relented realising the greatness of the Swami and gave him a royal reception. He taught them the future - kalajnanam - and moved from that place.

On the way to Kandimallayapalle, Veerabrahmendra taught Siddhaya the subtleties of direct perception of the ultimate reality and also the principle of virtue found in the Bhagavata. Before he passed away, Veerabrahmendra taught his wife and children the nature of the world. He taught Govindacharya to whom he wanted to give the responsibility of the Math-Hamsa Swarupa and the qualities of Chayapurusha. To Siddhaya, he taught his endless incarnations and foretold the future. When Govindamma prepared Prasad for the goddess Poleramma without informing her husband, the Swami invoked the Divine Presence of Poleramma physically, and made her partake the prasad offered.

When the Nawab of Kumool visited him, he foretold the future, i.e. taught him Kalajnana. The Swami then performed the coronation of Govindachari. Before Siddhayya who went to the forest to bring flowers for worship returned, the Swami taught Kalajnana to his wife and children. He told his wife and children that with the death of Govindamma, the clan - vamsa - will end and, further, the children of Veeranaraynamma will become heirs to the Math, and that five heroic mothers will be born to Govindachari and the eldest called Iswaramma was an incarnation of Parameshwari. Veerabrahmendra then entered samadhi. Siddhayya returned and wept inconsolably that his guru hoodwinked him and passed away. For, he realised that it was the final nirvana. Feeling that without his guru, his life was meaningless, he tried to commit suicide. Veerabrahmendra was deeply touched by Siddhayya's devotion, and he returned from mahasamadhi. He taught Siddhayya the philosophy of Achalapariipoorna and graced him with divine sight. Siddhayya saw the Cosmic Form of his guru. The Swami gave away his Yogadanda, sandals, sikhamudrika and his cane. He directed him to go to Mudumala, get married and follow the sadhana of Raja Yoga. The Swami then entered mahasamadhi irrevocably. Siddhayya followed the commands of his guru and lived propagating the greatness of his guru and writing many hymns, Tattvas. (His life story is found elsewhere.)

Andhra was convulsed, on the eve of Veerabrahmendra's birth, with Hindu-Muslim religious conflicts, caste dissensions, superstitions and decline of dharma. The avatara with a mission, Veerabrahmendra taught that the caste was a creation of humans, that all are equal in the eyes of the Supreme Lord, that a jnani, to whatever caste or status he or she belongs, is worthy of worship, that superstitions are born out of ignorance, that vices were the result of decline in virtue, and of selfishness and egoism. He opened the eyes of people to these truths by both his life and his teachings. He declared that child marriages, sacrifice of animals in the name of a religious rites, rituals, meaningless festivals are evil and should be prohibited. Thus he sowed seeds of radical social change. Among his disciple, we have the Brahmin, Annajayya, the Muslim

Siddhayya, the 'untouchable' (madiga) Kakkayya. Disciples of all castes and creeds partook his prasada. Those were the days of child marriages. But the Swami married Govindamma, only after she came of age. It was the age of the Nawabs. He won over the Nawabs of Banaganapalle, Siddhavatam, Karnool, Kadapa and Hyderabad by his extraordinary miracles and prepared the ground for Hindu-Muslim unity. Mahammad Baig Khan of Banganapalle, Abdulla Khutubsha of Hyderabad, Mohammad Meer Jumla of Siddhavatam and Mohammad Raja Ali of Kumool, Abdul Vahabkhan Abdul Aziz, Siddhi Masood Khan - rulers like these were greatly impressed by the Swami's splendour and spiritual fervour honored him with all respect and became his disciples. They gifted land and property to the Math at Banaganapalle and Kandimallayyapalle. Later, Brahmendra went to the court of Tanjore Raghunatharaya (1600-1631).

Among other disciples who served Veerabrahmendra with faith and devotion, mention may be made of Karanam Govindayya of Palugurallapalle, Poodota Ramanna, Chittor Narasimhadas, Kaluva Kotayya, Komalluri Veeraraghavulu, Thadicherla Chalamayya, Tadicharla Seshayya, Nasarayya, Ahobaladasu, Sunnapugunta Raghavulu, Aguvapalle Mahammad Hussain. Tarigonda Bhramaramba, Narahari, Jakkuleti Kambagiri, Ghantayya, Chenchuraju and others. They preserved the guru writings and propagated them through songs and discourses.

Like Vemana, Veerabrahmendra preached a universal message. Both wrote, in simple Telugu and in plain desi chandas, many poems and songs so that they make an indelible imprint on the hearts of common folk and awaken their dormant consciousness. Among the published works, we have (1) *Kalajnana*, (2) *Jeevaikyabodha* (3) *Dwipada Kalajnana* (4) Poems entitled *Paramahansa Kalikamba* (5) *Kalajnana Govinda Vakyas*. These writings contain many occult aspects regarding mantra, laya, hatha, swara and raja (tharaka, sankhya, amanaska) yoga, yama, Niyama, nadis, mudras, charkas, predictions, criticism of Pseudo Yogis etc. These are noted by Medapati Venkata Reddy in his study of Andhra Yogis. Brahmendra's songs are extremely popular and sung by a variety of people ranging from beggars, mendicants to accomplished musicians.

Veerabrahmendra made extensive predictions about events to happen at the end of Kali Yuga and they include many historical, geographical, social and Dharmic items. They say that like the prophesies of Nostradamas and Shifton, many came true. The rule of the white sahibs, the decline and degeneration of vama / caste system, modern civilization, steam-run vehicles, motor and rail transport, electric lights, the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, the importance of charkha, widow remarriages, divorce, the degeneration of the upper castes, the ascendancy of the lower castes, fake sadhus, drunkards and the lawless behavior of hooligans, the establishment of equality and the destruction of all unevenness - these are some of the things Veerabrahmendra predicted in his Kalajnana. He mentioned Vemana in his Kalajnana and *Veera Kalikambasathaka* but we do not know whether they met.

Veerabrahmendra entered Samadhi on 5-5-1693. This was Srimukha year, vaisakha suddha dasami, Friday, according to the Hindu Calendar. Celebrations are held on this day in Kandimallyapalle. His Kalyana Festival begins on Sivaratri and is held for three days. More devotees attend Aradhana festivals. Many spiritual and cultural programmes are held. There are many maths in and out of Andhra Pradesh named after Veerabrahmendra. The samadhis of Veerabrahmendra and Govindamma are placed side by side. In the main mantpa facing the sanctum sanctorum are the samadhis of many descendants of Veerabrahmendra. Adjacent to Veerabrahmendra's math Ishwaramma's math is built. Her samadhi mandir has been changed into a temple. To the east of the village is the math of Madiga Kakkayya.

We visited these maths on: 11-11-1999

Sources :

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9. POODOTA LINGAVADHUTA

(17th century)

For attaining moksha (liberation), Karma, Bhakti and Jnana paths of yoga are available. There are, again, many differences among these paths. The Jnanis who follow the path of Advaita state that the supreme aim of life is to attain moksha (liberation). But refining nature or prakriti by the process of enlightened knowledge (Vijnana), another path affirms, one has to attain the supreme Brahman (Parabrahma). After attaining that cosmic consciousness, one has to inform the entire cosmos including the gross body, with that awareness and make it luminous (Chinmaya). Among the latter, Poodota Lingavadhuta occupies a prominent place. The Gita says: "...devoted to the practice of Pranayama, regulate the movement of Prana and Apana, and offer as oblation Prana in Apana and likewise Apana in Prana." (IV... 29) Lingavadhuta is a most distinguished among those wonderful yogis who followed this injunction, this path of yoga and made his gross body a luminous vehicle. Liberal by conviction, he disregarded the doctrines of difference between Siva and Keshava, caste and creed distinctions, and religious, denominational variations. He propagated universal harmony, and its essential unity of mankind. His heart embraced entire humanity and he blended his sadhana with the perspective of universal humanity and opened the doors of a universal religion. Giving up differences between nations, castes and creeds and classes and, indeed, differences of every kind, he taught his integral, complete yoga. All great people seem to take birth for achieving and affirming social welfare, peace and harmony, defined in terms of the conditions obtaining at a particular point of time and place. Lingavadhuta, succeeding the era of Vemana and Veerabrahmendra and born three decades later, fulfilled the aims and objectives of these two predecessors.

By the 17th century, Andhra was in a decadent state politically, socially spiritually and ethically. The religious bigotry of the Muslims, caste and class differences among the Hindus, the atrocities of poligars and officials

violence in the name of sacrifices, selfish people who proclaimed the end and aim of life as sense-gratification and exploited and oppressed the common folk; when society was in this state of absolute decay and destruction, successively there appeared Vemana, Veerabrahmendra and Lingavadhuta to show the path of dharma to people. Through their sublime teachings and deeds they spread devotion, knowledge and peace.

In Banaganapalle in Kumool District, there is a famous pilgrim centre called Eganty dedicated to Siva. To its north there are caves in the mountains. Siddhas meditated in those caves from times immemorial. In the 17th century a sage rooted in Brahmajñana used to do tapas there. In Banaganapalle there was a great yogini called Garimireddi Acchamma. Her Math is called "Chintamanu" math. It was in this math that Veerabrahmendra learnt his first lessons. Sivaramaswami often came to this math and selected the intelligent ones in Acchamma's math, took them away and moulded them into realised beings. Before he left the math Veerabrahmendra foretold Acchamma that after some time another great sage-a mahatma-will come to the math.

Accordingly, in a village called Avuku, on the banks of the river Paleru in Kumool district, one auspicious day and propitious time, a male child - luminous and radiant-was born to the couple Somireddy and Somamma. They named him Lingamurti. At the age of five he began behaving strangely. Whenever possible, under a tree near his home he sat and repeated the Divine Name of Siva. Disregarding all distinctions of ethnicity, class or caste he played with all. Birds and beasts used to surround him. Looking at the sky, he made gestures, as if he was communicating messages to the planets and the stars. He used to be in a state of wakefulness in sleep and sleep in wakefulness.

Since he suddenly lost his parents in his boyhood, the head of the village Avuku, took him and kept him in Acchamma's Chintamanu math. When Acchamma asked him some questions, the boy answered in such a way that she realised that this was the boy whose advent Veerabrahmam predicted. When in ecstatic love she hugged and kissed Lingamurti, all

her mental modifications got dissolved and she experienced the truth of pure advaita. The next day Sivaramaswami arrived from Eganti and telling Acchamma about Lingamurti's divinity, he persuaded her to consent to his taking Lingamurti to Jurreru. Then Lingamurti took him to the river and after having a bath, Sivaramaswami initiated him. He instructed him to continue staying in Acchamma's math for a year, and told him that he will return and take him to Eganti caves and make him a repository of all Yogavidya. Lingamurti spent one year in Acchamma's care, and looked after the upkeep of the Ashram, Pooja, etc. After a year, Sivaramaswami returned and along with Lingamurti went to Sivalingaguha.

Lingamurti rose early in the morning and along with his guru did simple pranayama exercises and meditation. After bath he did the ritual of fire worship and abhisheka to the Linga in the cave and again completing japa and dhyana, he used to take cow's milk sent by devotees. There was scriptural study until the noon and then take lunch consisting of puffed flour or ragi flour. In the third quarter, teaching of the nature of Brahman, the ultimate Reality was imparted. In the evening they went to collect dry wood. Lingamurti in this way served his guru with utmost faith and devotion and in no time learnt all the secrets.

One day Lingamurti went to the forest as usual to collect twigs, and feeling extremely tired, slept under the shade of a tree. As the sun moved, the shade of the tree shifted. A serpent nagasarpa -came and unfurling its hood stretched it as a shade over his head. Sivaramaguru who saw this taught "hamsavidya" to Lingamurti. Soon Lingamurti achieved perfection in that. One day the other disciples of Sivaramaguru saw Lingamurti feeding a big monkey with the fruit he plucked for their guru. They went and informed their guru about this. Sivaramaguru came immediately, saw the strange spectacle and started reciting the Anjaneya stotra (hymn in praise). Then the monkey assumed the form of Anjaneya and told Sivaramaguru that Lingamurti was one born with his (Anjaneya's) own quality(ies) and added that Sivaramaguru should consider himself fortunate that he became the guru of Lingamurti. Anjaneya also revealed the future acts of Lingamurti and disappeared. The guru then taught

Lingamurti atmalingabhedanam. Lingamurti's sadhana of realizing his own self and the self as part of cosmic self came to a close. As a result of Japa and Dhyana the "Pranagrاندhi" and "Rudragrandhi" got dissolved or generated through by higher consciousness. This implies that the various sheaths (Kosas) generally identified as pranamaya, manomaya, and vijñanamaya Koshas got dissolved. He experienced the ultimate state of transcendence in which the form and the formless - the saguna and the nirguna are obliterated. This is the greatest experience in the life of a sadhaka.

One day Acchamma came to see Lingamurti and his guru Sivramaguru. She saw that achieving the varied stages / planes of yoga experience, Lingamurti was serving his guru with great devotion. Acchamma gave them the new clothes and sweets she brought. Sivaramaswami took Acchamma to a solitary place and narrated to her the profound greatness of Lingamurti and the powers he had. He explained all these aspects in terms of the practice of yoga. After some days Sivaramaguru stopped Lingamurti doing the work of collecting small twigs for rituals, and taught him the purest of transadental philosophy. Under the guidance of his guru Lingamurti plunged, day and night, into intense meditation on Parasakti (Supreme Power) and had darshan of Mahakali, Mhalakshmi, and Mahasaraswati and received their grace and blessings. In this the meditation and the object of meditation became one. Immensely pleased with the progress his disciple made, the guru taught him drisyabhedana yoga. With this, Lingamurti achieved the complete experience of Advaita state of realisation. Then the guru instructed him in the yoga of sentience (Chaitanya = awareness) and insentience (Jada). This is called the Chinmaya Yoga. Lingamurti who succeeded in this yoga became Chinmaya Lingamurti. His realization of Yoga was complete. There was nothing left for the guru to teach. And, for the disciple, there was nothing further to learn. Thus Lingamurti became Chinmaya Lingamurti. 12 years elapsed in the service of the guru. He was now 20 years old.

Sivarama guru told Lingamurti: "Son! You are the incarnation of the

supreme cosmic consciousness and as such it is time you undertook the work of regenerating the people. Yourself and your senior Veerabrahmendra should, through your writings and discourses, cleanse society of its evils and lead people on the path of virtue (dharma). I am establishing the Poodota Guru Peetha for your sake. You are the first president of that math. I am bestowing on you new name : Poodota Lingavadhuta. What you are establishing is universal religion. Breaking the chains which bound them so far, you must carry the truths of Vedas and Vedic religion to the common people, indeed make them available to entire humanity. I shall watch your progress and fame for some time more and then give up the body. Your fame will remain as long as the planets remain."

He then embraced his disciple and transmitted to him all his powers. On that very evening, Acchamma came from Chintamanu Math. Lingavadhuta prostrated to his first guru Acchamma and his second guru and expressed his gratitude. Holding on his head the sacred blessings of these two gurus, he did namaskars to the cave he stayed so long and to the deity Umamaheswara. Then he accompanied Acchamma on the journey. When he asked his guru what he could offer to him as a symbol of his guru as gurudaskhina - he said : "Propagating the message of universal harmony and peace and thereby building a social order free from all differences of caste, creed and colour, ensuring prosperity and peace for the whole world is the only gift you can give me." Lingavadhuta stayed for two days with Acchamma and, with her permission, set out for and reached Rawalakonda, a mountain nearby.

Rawalakonda is formerly called Erramala lying to the north east of Banganapalle situated to the south of Jurreru. Formerly, it contained diamond mines. Even now during the rainy season one comes across tiny diamonds. In the caves of that mountain, Lingavadhuta lived wearing only a lion cloth. He ate whatever was offered by those who came to gather diamonds. They thought he was a mad person and made him carry water pots and gave him food as wages. One evening a poor gatherer of diamonds, failing to collect a single diamond and unable to feed his

wife and children, as an escape from that destitute condition attempted suicide. Lingavadhuta prevented his attempt and listening his plight, took pity on him. He stretched his hand and from below a piece of rock, he took out some very big diamond pieces and gave them to the poor fellow. The man sold these invaluable diamonds and became a very rich man. From that day onwards, hordes of poor people began coming to Lingavadhuta and gradually thanks to the talk of these people from surrounding villages the name and fame of Lingavadhuta reached the Nawab of Banaganapalle.

The Nawab wanted to test the veracity of the words about Lingavadhuta which reached him. He came riding on his horse, and saluting the Avadhuta asked him whether he could tell the gender, color and the qualities of the little horse carried in her womb by the horse on which he rode and came for the darshan of Lingavadhuta. The Avadhuta with his divine foresight "saw" all the details and told the Nawab all these details exactly. The ruthless Nawab, to know whether the Avadhuta told the facts or not, got the pregnant horse's head cut off and the child taken out from the womb. The details that the Avadhuta revealed tallied exactly with those found on the new-born little horse. Amazed at the Avadhuta's powers, the Nawab prayed to him that he should stay in his estate and that he would honour him with the gifts of untold riches, land etc. Lingavadhuta was shocked at the cruelty he saw in the Nawab. Taking pity on the hapless horse, he got obsequies performed for her and applying some of its ash to his forehead and packing some more, he started in the direction of Srisailam and Mahanandi. By sunrise he reached a pool of water near a village called Kanala. There he found a huge tree, surrounded by thorny bushes. He chose that spot as congenial to his need for solitude.

Lakshmamma was the devoted wife of a farmer in Kanala. She was a repository of great virtues. Full of compassion, she came to the rescue of the poor and destitute. She possessed lots of cattle and she kept a small boy to look after them their grazing etc. One day he took the cattle

for grazing, as usual. But he soon noted that a cow was missing and worried he set out in her search. He finally located her near the Avadhuta and the sight he saw was really strange: the cow was seen before the Lingavadhuta and looking steadily at him, was shedding tears copiously. The boy came back and reported the strange incident to Lakshmamma. Next day, at noon, she prepared some gruel and taking some drinking water along, she set out to see the Avadhuta. He was in deep contemplation, with eyes closed. Lakshmamma placed the food and waited patiently for him to take them. But all in vain. The next day Lakshmamma went at slightly later with food and water. Noticing that the Swami ate a little, she took the rest as his Prasad and placing the food she brought before him, she left. Lakshmamma used to do likewise regularly.

Time passed. The entire area was struck by severe famine. There was nothing to feed the cattle and not a drop of drinking water was available for the famine stricken villagers. The situation was so grave that the farmers decided to leave the village and migrate. Lakshmamma also decided to migrate. Taking whatever little food and water was available she went to the swami and placed them before him. She started shedding tears at the prospect of being deprived of the darshan of the Avadhuta. She cried and cried at the misfortune of not being able to see the swami.

The compassionate Avadhuta opened his eyes and asked why she was crying so piteously. Lakshmamma felt immense joy that the Swami at last opened his eyes and talked to her. At the same time, she was overwhelmed with sorrow that she had to go without the invaluable darshan of the great sage. She told the swami about her misfortune and the fact that she had to migrate brought tears again to her eyes. The Avadhuta gently smiled and declared that there was no need to migrate. He assured her that with the blessings of Sri Ramachandra rains will come and they will be relieved from the famine. He asked her to return to her home without any anxiety or worry. Then the swami sang a Kirtan addressing Lord Ramachandra, the purport of which was not to let him down in the eyes of those who had faith in him. Instantly torrential

rains set in. The ponds, tanks, wells, all were soon overflowing with water. Lakshmamma's Joy knew no bounds and she revealed to all the villagers that this was due to the compassion and concern of the Avadhuta staying on the outskirts of their village. Hence forward, all the villagers started seeking the darshan of the swami and his blessings. After some days, many mendicants began coming to that spot. They begged alms in the village and partake of whatever they got unsought, sitting under the shade of that tree. But Lakshmamma continued to send food for the Swami from her home.

Often Lingavadhuta sang songs with Vedantic themes, extempore. Several sadhus memorised them and going about the villages used to sing them. Not only common folk but even scholars praised the Avadhuta's compositions, couched in chaste Telugu and containing the essence of Vedantic philosophy.

Once the pontiff of Pushpagiri Peetha visited Nandyal and stayed in the local Anjaneya temple. A mendicant went in that direction, singing joyfully a philosophical song composed by Lingavadhuta. The pontiff, struck by the depth and range of the composition asked who the composer was. Immediately the Jagadguru sent his disciples along with a palanquin to respectfully bring the Avadhuta. The Avadhuta refused to come and if he so inclined the Jagadguru himself could come, but all alone. The pontiff realised that the Avadhuta was a Siddha Purusha, a perfected one, and started for Kanala where the Avadhuta stayed. He got off the palanquin at a distance and went by foot, alone, to the Avadhuta.

The Avadhuta greeted him and asked "I asked only yourself to come. But why two came?" The Jagadguru replied, with surprise: "My disciples are all at a distance. I came alone, can't you see." Then the Avadhuta said "Your gross body and your shadow - the shadow of that body - have come. So there are two." So saying Lingavadhuta came away from the shade of the tree and showed him that he himself had no shadow. The Jagadguru was stunned and realised that not having a shadow is the signal of cosmic consciousness. With reverential joy he saluted the Avadhuta.

Avadhuta then explained to him the purpose of his advent and told him about his gurus Sivaramabrahma and his guru Sri Ramachandra Parabrahma. The Jagadguru returned to Nandyal and entered the Anjaneya temple. But he saw a strange thing: in the place of the image of Hanuman, he saw the divine, radiant form of the Avadhuta. He realised the greatness of the Avadhuta, and filled with wonder and surprise cried Hurra to him.

In a village near Kanala a brahmin with immense magic spells lived. He used to frighten the common folk with these siddhis and test the rich and the famous. He considered the ordinary people as not worth his concern. Since they were low in his esteem. Once a gathering of sadhus took place. The Brahmin went there but some of the sadhus who knew his nature told him : "Sir ! we are people of no consequence. We do not have any status or powers. Why do you want to use your great powers on us? You should go to Kanala village. There, under the shade of a tree, you will find a great sage, Linguvadhuta. He is far superior to you. Please go and exercise your psychic powers on him!"

The brahmin was furious to learn that someone far superior to him lived. He immediately got on to his horse, and with tremendous speed reached the village and saw the Avadhuta sitting, as the sages told him, under the shade of a tree, immersed in meditation. The very sight of Lingavadhuta filled his mind with something of the shock of a flash of Lightning. Deciding to test what powers the Avadhuta had, he sent Mahasakti, a great charge of psychic power, towards the Avadhuta. All the three times, the Avadhuta grasped the psychic power, pushed them under his thigh, and continued meditating, with closed eyes, as if nothing had happened. When the greatest mantric powers he possessed were swept away like pieces of straw by a swift current of water, the Brahman realised that Lingavadhuta was an incarnation of God. He prostrated to him, even as his Himalayan egoism melted and took the form of the copious tears he began shedding.

Meanwhile, Lakshmamma arrived, as usual, with food for the Avadhuta. She placed it before him, took the remainings of the previous

day food as the Avadhuta's Prasad. She saw the prostrated bhrahman and thinking he was one of those devotees who seek the Avadhuta to put an end to their distress, left him alone. For three days, the brahman was in the same position. Lakshmamma continued bringing food but noticed that it was left untouched. On the third day the Avadhuta opened his eyes and gave his benediction to the Brahmin. The Brahmin pleaded that the Avadhuta should forgive him and give his blessings. The ever compassionate Avadhuta lifted him from the ground and said: "My dear child! From now onwards give up all your psychic powers. You are now the second child of Poodota. From today, your name is Dasavadhuta!" So saying the Avadhuta gave him the highest transcendental experiences and freed him from the grip of all past Karma, Prarabdha. Lakshmamma asked the Avadhuta to give her also his blessings, making her his ever-obedient follower. The Avadhuta smiled and said : "Since you fed me unfailingly like your child, you are, indeed, my mother ask for anything and I shall give you!" He then gifted her with the initiation into Ramataraka mantra. Thus two flowers bloomed in the garden of Brahmajnana. (Poodhota means garden.) Lakshmamma continued to bring food for both the Avadhutas, reverentially prepared by herself. There was, in Kanala village, another woman devotee by name Ishwaramma, belonging to the Vaishya caste.

One day Dasavadhuta told his master: "Allow me to build a small cottage for you. Moreover, I shall also go for alms in the village and bring bhiksha, prasada, for you. Kindly agree to my proposal". The Avadhuta said that he could go ahead with the idea of building a cottage. But since Lakshmamma may feel upset about begging for alms in the village, it is better to get the consent before doing anything. As expected, Lakshmamma was upset and with tears in her eyes pleaded that she should not be, now, denied the great fortune of bringing prasada for the swami. But the Avadhuta finally succeed in persuading her, arguing that other devotees should also get a chance to serve him ! Moreover, the very first bhiksha is to be given everyday by Lakshmamma only. The plan was implemented and Dasavadhuta begged for alms from 10-15

households everyday. The prasada they got was sufficient even to feed pilgrims who came for the darshan of Lingavadhuta. Even after centuries this tradition continues, uninterruptedly. Devotees who receive the prasada are blessed with physical health and mental wellbeing.

Once a sorcerer of Katipapala caste with powers of black magic was seen going through the street where the vaisyas lived. He created snakes and scorpions by his magical powers the Kshudra shaktis - and terrifying the merchants began collecting lots of money. Dasavadhuta scolded him but the arrogant sorcerer started abusing him in a vulgar way. Dasavadhuta knew that he could not do anything without the permission of his guru. Therefore, he merely prevented the sorcerer from animating the scorpions and snakes he was creating by paralyzing his hand. When the black magician's wives wailed at this calamity, the people who gathered there advised them go to the ashram and seek the forgiveness of Lingavadhuta and his disciple. The three of them went to the ashram and fell at the feet of the Avadhuta. They sought his forgiveness and repented for their folly. Lingavadhuta told them: "You three give up your evil, malevolent powers and live in this ashram without any evil intentions."

Lingavadhuta initiated the two women with Rama mantra and named them Jnaneswari and Yogeswari. He got the black magic man's hair tonsured, and consigned all his evil powers to the sacrificial fire and gave him the name of Bhadravadhuta. He gave him a ritual bath, new clothes and initiated him into the Mahamantra. He announced that after Dasavadhuta, Bhadravadhuta will become the head of the peetha. All the three stayed in the ashram and made remarkable spiritual progress.

Another incident is worth mentioning. On an Ekadashi day, the inhabitants of a village near Kanala invited the Avadhuta for the special pooja on that day. The Swami reached the village in the evening of Dasami. On that very night, the marriage of Eswaramma's son took place. After the ceremony was over they returned to Kanala and as soon as the newly married couple entered the house, that very moment a

deadly cobra stung the bridegroom. He died instantly. The bride was stunned at this tragedy and wept inconsolably. Eswaramma locked herself up in solitude and began praying intensely to her guru Lingavadhuta. It was around 11 'O clock in the night.

The omniscient Avadhuta returned to his ashram and instructed Dasavadhuta to go to Kanala and beg for alms, as usual. The disciple asked "who will give alms at this hour of the night, Swami?" The Swami said "You look for a house where a lamp is still burning." Dasavadhuta went to Eswaramma's house where a lamp was still burning and asked for alms. The people who gathered there scolded him for asking alms when they were all filled with grief on the death of the newly married bridegroom. Eswaramma however, recognised the voice of Dasavadhuta. She made the bride give alms to him. Dasavadhuta went back to the Ashrama and told him about the calamity that happened in Eswaramma's house.

The Avadhuta smiled and asked him to go and bring Eswaramma as well as the bride and bridegroom to the Ashram. Accordingly they came along with relations and some villagers. The swamy asked Dasavadhuta to do abhisheka to the bride and the bridegroom and dress them in turmeric - coloured clothes. Then Lingavadhuta placed his divine hand on the head of the dead bridegroom and made him live again. Then he again performed their marriage and gave the villagers a grand wedding dinner. The villagers praised the Lingavadhuta and his miraculous powers reached far off places like distant tidal waves.

There was an actress who was a devotee of the Avadhuta, living in Banganapalle. Once she was acting the role of Satyabhama, her costumes caught fire and the entire hall was filled with fearful cries. Like Draupadi who called upon Sri Krishna in an hour of crisis in the court of Kauravas, the actress prayed desperately to her master, Lingavadhuta, to come to her rescue. At that very hour, the Avadhuta was seen enacting a scene in which he was putting out a fire with his angavastra. (towel). The dancer at Banaganapalle was saved. She came the next day to Kanala, rushed to the ashram and expressed her desire to give up her profession and

serve the swami in the ashram. Lingavadhuta initiated her with the Ramatarakamantra and asked her to do sadhana for two years and then join the ashram.

The Avadhuta used to sing, in the evenings, bhajans and Kirtans expressive of his philosophy. These were collected and written on palm leaves by Dasavadhuta, his disciple. These were later published as a collection entitled Poodota Tattva Gitamrita by Anandanada Swami, the tenth pontiff of the Peetha, in 1962.¹ I had the privilege of meeting this swami in 1976. The philosophy propagated by Lingavadhuta is called Mahadvaita and his yoga is named Paramayoga. Like the Bhagavadgita, the songs that the Avadhuta composed and sang are 700 in number. The Paramaguru Sivarama considered the entire universe as a flower garden and therefore called his math symbolically Poodota (flower garden). Since the doctrine of the world as illusion implicit in Advaita led the vedic culture and philosophy astray, Sivramaguru named his tattva, doctrine, as Mahadvaita. For achieving the unity of mankind, he named his religion as universal Religious consciousness. According to this the concept propagated by sages as liberation while alive — Jeevan mukti - is only the first step, the first note of universal music. The second step is to bring the Power of Brahman awareness (Brahmashakti) to bear upon and inform physical existence, and to infuse the totality of life with that awareness is the second step. This is moulded as Awareness yoga - Chinmaya Yoga (Yoga of Blissful Awareness). Since both jada and chaitanya infuse each other this yoga of the Avdhuta - enunciated through experience by his gurus is called Parama Yoga; the supreme Yoga. In the Avadhuta's songs and lyrics, we find explication to the subtleties of Mantra, laya, Hatha and Raja Yogas. Like the Bhagavad Gita, Lingavadhuta propagated the sadhana doctrines of Jiva, Vishwa, Purushottama and Tattva mandalas. It is held that after Vedavyasa it was Lingavadhuta alone who propagated the path of the sadhana of Vishwa Mandala.

The uniqueness and originality of Lingavadhuta's sadhana doctrines as embodied in his own life, made them extremely popular in the Andhra

and Karnataka regions. As a consequence, Lingavadhuta Maths were established in Banaganapalle, Rawalakonda, Gollapeta, Kanala, Bethamcherla, Sivavaram, Tarimela and Gadilanka. Through these centers, the Avdhuta's life and message got diffused far and wide.

Things began drawing to a close in Avadhuta's life. Once when he was immersed in Akhanda Samadhi, continuous state of divine absorption, he had the vision of Anjaneya who told him that the time was approaching for his giving up the physical body. The Swami informed his disciples about this and installed Dasavadhuta as the next pontiff. This was an Jyeshtha Suddha Poomima day. A week after this the Avadhuta started on a pilgrimage to Sangameswara. He left Kanala for Nandyal, along with Jnaneswari, Dasavadhuta and Bhadravadhuta who sang their guru's compositions all the way. He took his bath in Kundu river and took his bhiksha in the neighbouring village. Meanwhile, Lakshmamma and Eswaramma reached the place. On Jyeshtha Bahula Ekadasi, the Avadhuta reached Chinnavanam on the coast of Sangameswara. On the morning of Dwadasi, Dasavadhuta gave a panchamrita bath to his guru, and dressed him in new clothes. Jnaneswari, Yogeswari, Lakshmamma and Eswaramma gave formal aarathi to their guru. As the assembled devotees sang songs praising the guru, hailing him as an avatara, Lingavadhuta reached the current of the Krishna river. Jnaneswari received his permission' to go with him. Reaching knee deep water, Lingavadhuta sang a fare well song to his devotees. Dasavadhuta spread a mat - a Krishnajinam - on the waves of the Krishna river. The Swami sat on it in the lotus posture and reached the middle of the river. In no time fiery flames encircled the Lingavadhuta and they got transformed into radiant light which shot up in the direction of the sun. Jnaneswari got dissolved in the subtle, radiant body of the guru, Lingavadhuta. The disciples Dasavadhuta, Bhadravadhuta, Eswaramma and Lakshmamma installed their guru's Padukas, holy sandals of wood and his compositions - *Tattva gitamrita* in the Kanala Math. Annual celebrations of Lingavadhuta are held regularly in all the Maths he founded.

There are sure some differences of opinion about the caste of the guru. Some suggest that he belongs to the Reddy clan and some others claim that he is a Setti balija. It is also held that he was a disciple of Poodota Ramaiah. All these have to be resolved through further research. But the fact remains that Lingavadhuta is one of the most remarkable Andhra sages.

Sources:

1. *Sri Poodota tattvagithamritamu* - 1962
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10. KESAVASWAMI BHAGANAGARKAR (1610 - 1683)

The capital of Andhra Pradesh, Hyderabad, was first known as Bhagyanagar. The river Musi which flows through Hyderabad was known as river Muchikunda. In the riverbed of Musi lie the samadhis of Hindu and Muslim yogis in hundreds. With the ascension of AsaQahis after Khutubshahis, Hyderabad's domain consisted of Telugu, Maharashtra and Kannada regions. Therefore, in addition to Muslims there were also people belonging to those three regions. Some sants came from Maharashtra, settled here and attained Siddhi; prominent among them are Kesava Swami (Bhaganagarkar), Bhaskar Maharaj, Bhatji Bapu Maharaj and Narayana Maharaj. Under the protection of these four saints the citizens of Bhagyanagar sailed on the boats of peace during those turbulent times.

At a place now known as Habshiguda, along the bank of river Musi, we can see the Holy Feet - Paduka's - of Kesavaswami installed, there, underneath those replicas, one can see his samadhi also.

17th century was a critical period for Andhradesa. As a result of the indescribable atrocities of the Muslim rulers and Nawabs, Hindu dharma was eclipsed. The problems sages like Vemana, Potuluri Veerabrahmam and Poodota Lingavadhuta faced are quite different from those encountered by Kesavaswami and Kancharla Gopanna (1620-1687) in the Telangana region. The upper castes succumbed to the inducements of the foreign rulers, imitated their manners, the common folk found their customs and traditions flickering, almost extinguished.

That was the period of the tyrant Aurangazeb's reign. Hyderabad was under Abdullah Khutubshah (1626-1672) and Abul Hasan Tanisha (1672-1687). Living amidst the hegemony and atrocities of these rulers, Kesavaswami, the great sage, tried heroically to protect the Hindu religion and spirituality, its culture and civilization. He won over the minds and

hearts of his compatriots by the propagation of the tenets of bhakti, jnana and vairagya among the people. Not only common folk but also some distinguished intellectuals gathered round him. Like Eknath, Tukaram and Samarth Ramdas, Kesavaswami created among the Hindus profound awareness of their great religion and culture. He infused tremendous courage into their sagging spirits and strengthened their will to face the problems Hindus were encountering at that time. He disarmed even his sworn enemies with his love and dispassion. No wonder his samadhi has become a holy pilgrim place for people of diverse faiths.

The guru of Chatrapathi Sivaji, Samarth Ramadas along with four other saints - Jayaramaswami Vargaonkar, Ranganathaswami Nigidikar, Kesavaswami Bhaganagarkar and Anandamurti Brahmanalkar is known as Dasa Panchayatan or Samarth Panchayatan. The names of Maharashtrians have generally the names of their native places appended at the end. Kesavaswami Bhaganagarkar, therefore means, Kesavaswami of Bhagyanagar. Though they had their own individuality, and fields of action these five saints had a common cluster of aims: to protect Hindu dharma and culture which are spiritually oriented, to energise people to shoulder their responsibility in this respect, and purge all superstitions. These saints used to meet often in Pandharpur. When Kesavaswami met Samarth Ramadas, he expressed his wish to stay in Pandharpur, permanently. Samarth told him that his field of action was Bhagyanagar and therefore, it was vital to stay there.

Kesavaswami's birth place is Kalyani near Nilanga. This is now in Bidar District of the Karnataka state. There lived a Brahmin couple by name Atmaram and Gangabai. Atmaram was the village head (revenue head) of Kalyani. The couple were not blessed with children. Gangabai performed countless vratas and fasts for a child - and they undertook pilgrimage to Pandharpur every year. At the advanced age of 80 a son was born to Gangabai. Devotees of Panduranga, named the child as Kesava. By birth Kesava was intoxicated with divine madness. For five years he could not speak and they thought he was congenitally dumb. Once when he went for the darshan of Jagadguru Sankaracharya, he

initiated him with a mantra and blessed him, keeping his hand on his head. Instantly, his speaking ability was awakened, and words gushed forth like a perennial spring. He rapidly progressed in his education and the thread ceremony was duly performed at the appropriate age.

Kesava, later, was married to the daughter of one Sridhar Pant Sabnavis, also native of Kalyani. Since Kesava was inherently gifted with dispassion towards worldly life, he was immersed in spiritual practices and was averse to any secular activity. He got initiated by Kasirajaswami, a celebrated sage of that time and toured the villages propagating the philosophy of bhakti and jnana. As a result of these wanderings, he reached Bhagyanagar. The citizens of the city were immensely attracted by his eloquence and the authenticity of his discourses. Some Muslim intellectuals and devotees were charmed by the teachings of Kesava. With the intention that Kesavaswami should stay in Bhagyanagar and continue to enlighten them, they gifted him a piece of land and built a Math on it. His samadhi is there today in that very place. Kesavaswami attained Mahasamadhi on the 1st of January in 1683. He was about 73 years old. (Therefore, his year of birth should be around 1610).

Kesavaswami is a great Swami who even while living in the world and in the midst of family, achieved great spiritual eminence. In his view the secular and the spiritual are not two different fields. Since Samarth Ramdas (1608 - 1682) and Kesavaswami were contemporaries they heard about each other. And when they met eventually, for the first time, Samarth embraced Kesava with great affection and Kesava asked him: "A saint as you are, did you run away afraid of a woman? Were you filled with fear of maya and samsara?" The purport of these words is that one should remain in the world - in samsara - and yet have dispassion and detachment. This somewhat difficult job Kesavaswami performed gloriously; that was the reason why he asked Ramadas in that manner.- Obviously, Kesavaswami achieved a level of transcendence where dualities do not affect the consciousness, or disturb the awareness of Brahman which is beyond all dualities. He said: "The body is the stone well. Mind is the pestle. With that one has to pound into powder the

notion of a separate self. Sifting the chaff of knowledge and ignorance one should gather the flour of Krishna, the Pure Form of Absolute Consciousness." Thus both Eknath and Kesavaswami propagated the oneness and unity of the secular and spiritual lives.

Agitated by the threat to Hindu culture and religion by the social and political trends of the time, Kesavaswami undertook the job of integrating the diverse elements in the society towards a common objective. This was not an easy job. It was like entering a den to beard the lion in its own habitat. For that one requires superhuman strength and conviction, and Kesava was overflowing with them. Hindus were called Kafirs in Hyderabad. Their gods, their gurus, and their conventions were humiliated as Kafir-ridden at every step. But, then, Kesavaswami won the hearts of some enlightened Muslims. Some liberal Muslims were strongly attracted by his teachings and his exalted life. They looked upon him with great respect and this enhanced the respect and prestige of the Hindu community.

To achieve this much-needed goal, Kesavaswami adopted two strategies. (1) He evoked tremendous respect for Hinduism and its unique spiritual traditions among people belonging to other faiths. (2) He made the Hindus - people of his own faith - realise the true, authentic nature of their own faith. He removed evil practices such as animal sacrifices in the name of religion. He tried to bring a sense of equality in a society divided in the name of caste, creed etc. He faced tremendous odds in this respect. By the blessings and grace of Sri Krishna and Panduranga Vitthala, he overcame these obstacles. Kesavaswami chose the coast of Muchikunda river as the field of his action. This was a tremendous step. Many Muslims became the Swami's devotees. Shah Turab, a Sufi poet, was greatly influenced by the teachings of Kesavaswami. He constantly pined.

"Where could I see Ramadas and Kesavadas and how shall I pour out my agony."

He translated Samarth Ramadas' work called "Manache Slok" as "Man Samjhavan."

Kesavaswami taught people by his own practice, what is authentic, genuine Hindu dharma. He taught, also, the futility of worshipping several gods and tried to bring all people under the umbrella as one dharma, one religion. He infused great confidence among the people. He propagated the chanting of divine Name and exposed the deceptions of false mendicants. Pompous discourses, sterile scholarship and jugglery of words, he declared, do not give knowledge of Brahman. Verbal familiarity does not yield spiritual realization. It is only by surrendering to saints and sages that one has direct spiritual experience. And only when one has genuine devotion that one gets the holy company of saints. For this reason, he widely propagated the path of devotion, a path which was widespread and brings the well being of humanity. The social integration that Samarth Ramdas Swami achieved in Maharashtra, Kesavaswami achieved in Hyderabad.

In the biography of Samarth Ramdas written by Sadasiva Khando Althekar we get a picture of how intimate the relation between Kesavaswami and Samarth was. This is evident from the correspondence they had. Atmaram Maharaj in his book *Dasa Vishramdham* described Kesavaswami as a 'great yogi, "Yogadhya bali." Although Kesavaswami was, like Jnaneswar, a great yogi he led the common folk along the royal path of devotion, bhakti. Kesavaswami belonged to Mukundaraj tradition. The three traditions of Mukundaraj, Varkari and Samarth Ramdas mingled in Kesavaswami, like the Triveni confluence of rivers. The geneology of Mudalgi Math gurus is like this. (1) Haranath, (2) Raghunath, (3) Mukundaraj, (4) Narasimha Bharati, (5) Jagannath (6) Sahaja Rangabodh and (7) Kesavaswami. Many scholars have portrayed the tradition of Kesavaswami as different from the above sampradaya tradition. However, Kesavaswami never specified anywhere his tradition. Kesavaswami was a great self-realised yogi. He was a live example of a great yogi delighting continually in his own self - an atmarama. Therefore, he embodied the essence of undifferentiated, unified bhakti tradition. Just as a lump of gold is gold both inside and outside, similarly Kesava Swami's realization of the

knowledge of the self resulted in the basic perception of the Mahavakya, / Aham Brahmasmi, "I am Brahman and none else." We find, therefore, nondual Bhakti in Kesavaswami.

Kesavaswami composed many Abhangas in Hindi and Marathi. 850 of these, with their musical notations, are printed. In 1941, Sridhar Vaman Naik of Hyderabad published them as *Sri Kesavaswami Chi Kavitha*. These are spiritual - erotic lyrics and remind us of the songs in Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda*, with beautiful descriptions of the lilas of Sri Rama and Sri Krishna. Besides, *Kesavaswami* has many writings resembling *puzzles-prahelikas*. Like our folk riddles which are in the form of *puzzles-podupu kathas* - the expressed meaning is different from the implied one. In Marathi they are called *koota* writings. Though the language and meaning express worldly subjects and matters their spiritual meanings are extremely subtle and complex. They are great mystical texts. The 350 texts of this nature composed by saint Eknath are called Bharuds. The 2700 slokas and 231 padas Kesavaswami wrote lie unpublished in the Samarth Vagdevi Mandir of Sankara Srikrishna Dev.

There are some miracles performed by Kesavaswami. But these are meant only to awaken faith and make bhakti rooted in the devotees' consciousness. Yogis perform such miracles to open the prejudiced eyes of adversaries. Moreover, one need not expend one's precious Yogashakti for trivial things which one can accomplish by ordinary means.

An incident illustrates this: Once the five sants of Samartha group reached the banks of the Krishna river. At that time the river was in flood and they had to cross the river. They decided that they would use their yogic power and cross the river. Samarth Ramdas recited the Hanumath Stotra and the great devotee of Sri Ramachandra manifested himself and took Samarth across the river to the other side. Ranganatha and Jayarama Swamis, and Ananda Murti invoked their respective chosen ideals - their Ishta Devatas - and with that yogic power, they waded across the river. Kesavaswami didn't do anything similar. He paid one anna to a boatman and crossed the river. The other four sants laughed

(with disdain?) seeing this. Then Kesavaswami said: "It is not proper to expend one's siddhis or psychic powers for trivial things, in this way. It is not, also, proper to trouble our chosen ideals - Ishta Devatas - for such things. You used your yogic powers to cross the river. But in my view your yoga shakti is not more valuable than the one anna I spent for the same job. The primary qualities of a devotee are self-experience and disinterested - nishkama - devotion."

One extraordinary incident made Kesavaswami the most celebrated sant in and outside Hyderabad. This is mentioned by Bhimaswami in his *Bhakti Leelamritha* and Rajaramprasadi in his *Bhaktamanjari*.

One day Kesavaswami was performing Harikatha. Men, women and children were listening, with rapt attention, immersed in the pastimes - lilas - of the Lord. Kesavaswami was a great devotee of Sri Krishna and he was, naturally, recounting the marvelous sports of Sri Krishna. He was so immersed that he did not have an iota of outer consciousness. It was at that moment that a Muslim Pahilwan - a Pathan - entered the pandal: Kesavaswami realised this and cordially invited him. The Pathan, even as he listened to the Lord's Lilas, a wicked thought entered his mind. He observed a painting in which Sri Radha was offering some betel leaves to her beloved Sri Krishna. Seeing that the wickedness took a concrete shape: He pointed to the picture and cried at the top of his voice, startling the entire gathering: "If your Radha really makes Sri Krishna eat those betel leaves, I shall believe that your story is real. If it doesn't happen, I shall collect hundred rupees from each one of you here as punishment," Then he closed the doors and thus imprisoned everyone.

At this sudden turn of events, the audience was mortally afraid. They felt also immensely sad that the absorbing story of the Lord came to this abrupt end. This kind of Pathan's behavior was very common in the Hyderabad of those days. Terrified, all of them stood up. Kesavaswami's voice trembled and his eyes were filled with tears, He supplicated with his heart and soul:

If, Lord, You are fond of Your Lilas
Then manifest yourself and Do the miracle !

So saying, Kesavaswami started the chanting of the Lord's name. The devotees joined him and sang the holy name of the Lord, loud and clear, charged with faith and devotions. In no time there was a flash of lightning. The betel leaves were clearly seen in the mouth of Lord Sri Krishna. Seeing this miracle, the Pathan was petrified with terror. He fell at Kesavaswami's feet and craved his forgiveness. Kesavaswami blessed him and he became his devotee.

Another strange, miraculous incident happened. Kesavaswami, the Sultan heard, saw God as omnipresent. This presence evident in all that exists, permeating the entire universe. The Sultan invited Kesavaswami and, got meat served on plates of gold for everyone assembled there. The Sultan told the sage, looking dismayed at this: "The one Atman is in everyone and everything. Isn't the Lord present in every object, in every thing. Therefore, please eat what is served, because no dualistic thought should exist in your mind!" Kesavaswami felt that he was face to face with a critical, embarrassing challenge. But this was also a challenge to his faith, to his devotion. Then the Swami prayed with intense devotion to Varaha, the Lord incarnate form as a pig. Instantly, Varaha in the form of a piglet appeared there. Swami placed his plate of food before it and the piglet ate the offered faeces. For Muslims, the pig is a loathsome creature. The Sultan, shocked, asked: "What is this, a practical joke?" "No. There should not be any difference in eating what is offered for you and me!" said Kesavaswami. The Sultan's humiliation was complete. In this way, the Supreme Lord saved the devotee, Kesavaswami. After this, devotion for the Swami grew steadily among the Muslims.

Many such events took place in the life of Kesavaswami. Once someone with a vicious temperament poisoned the food, Prasada, offered to the Lord. After the pooja, the devotees took the Prasada. The poison didn't have any effect. But the image of the Lord changed its colour to blue! Obviously, the Lord himself absorbed the poison. Once a Muslim

devotee saw the child Krishna sitting on the shoulders of Kesavaswami!

Such miracles need not make us uneasy. For, intense faith makes everything possible, however unnatural or bizarre it appears. There is absolutely no doubt that the Presence of Sri Krishna was always there with this saint. Even now, after three centuries, Kesavaswami protects all those who surrender to him. The place of his Mahasamadhi in Hyderabad is a holy sthala for countless devotees. We offered our prayers at this Samadhi on 21-4-1999 and many times after.

Source:

The Hindi translation by Anantaro Ramdasi of the Marathi book, Sri Kesavaswami Bhaganagarkar - by Prof. Vimalabai Thatte.

11. SRIDHARA VENKATESA AYYAVAL (1635-1720)

Five yogis propagated chanting the divine name of Bhakti yoga, the path of devotion, in the Kaveri region. They are: Sridhara Venkatesa Ayyaval, Bodhendra Saraswati the 59th pontiff of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetha (1638-1692), Sadasiva Brahmendra Sarasvati, Narayanatirtha and Sadguru Swami. It is a matter of great pride to Andhras that except Kanchi Swami, the rest were Andhras. Among these five, the first three were contemporaries. Sadguruswami's advent took place after hundred years (1776-1817). His original name was Venkataramadesika. He adopted the life of a mendicant, observed the patterns of chanting the Divine Name specially at Tallapaka, and stayed for some time in Marudanallur. He later settled in Bhagavatapura Agrahara (Brahmin quarter) near Tiruvisanallur, gifted to him by the ruler of Tanjore. The way of the chanting of the Divine Name, shaped by Sadguruswami, then, continues to be in vogue even now. Sadgruru Swami gave the old styles of chanting the Divine Name new musical notations with addition of bhava and raga.

Since Sridhara Venkatesa was a contemporary and classmate of Sadasivabrahmendra and considered him as his guru, we decided that the period to which he belonged was 1635-1720. Professor V. Raghavan is of the opinion that Sridhara Venkatesa was one of the recipients of the grants made to 46 scholars by Shahaji the ruler of Tanjore (1684-1712) in 1693. He gave these grants at a place called Tiruvisanallur, a name which Shahaji changed to Shaharajapura. Venkatesa belonged to the Velanati sect of Telugu Brahmins; his gothra was Kausika and he was the son of Sridhara Lingaraya.

Sridhara Venkatesa was a great scholar, a staunch devotee of Siva and a yogi-house holder. His chosen ideal was Mahalingaswami based in Tiruvida Marudur which is also known as Madhyarjuna. Seeing his

undifferentiating, supreme devotion to both Siva and Kesava (Vishnu), his virtuous character and compassion to all creatures, his contemporaries called him "Ayyaval". Even today he commands the same respect from the people who live on Kaveri river coast. In Tamlinadu, it is customary for devotional groups to sing his songs in the very beginning. Ayyaval and Bodhendra are the pioneers of the tradition of chanting the Divine Name and singing devotional songs to Him. Once Bodhendra was returning from Rameswaram and with the permission of his guru Atmabodha, he met Ayyaval in Tiruvisanallur. He read the compositions of Ayyaval - such as "Akhyasashthi" - and was delighted that they shared the same attitude of Supreme Devotion.

Sridhara Venkatesa is a gifted poet - scholar and wrote many books in Sanskrit. He also wrote the history of his patron and promoter of the path of devotion, Shahaji, in the form of a great Kavya with eight parts known as sargas. At the request of Shahaji, and with the help of two scholars named Nalladhvari, and his own namesake Venkateswarasastri, Sridhara compiled a lexicon called *Padamanimanjari*. These are his only two compositions on secular subjects. The rest of his writings were all of Bhakti and Vedanta. Among these one can mention *Akhyasashthi*, *Dayasataka*, *Kulirashtkam*, *Achyutasataka*, *Sivabhaktalakshana*, *SivabhaktiKalpalatika*, *Matrubhutashtakam*, *TaravaliStuthi*, *Stutipaddhati*, *Doshapariharashtakam* and *Bhagavannamabhushana*. Among these, only *Bhagavannamabhushana* is a magnum opus. In this book, Sridhara expanded the doctrine of Divine name on the basis of Sruti and Smriti texts. Bodhendra cited this in his book *Namamrilarasayana*. The rest of his composition are very slender and are full of the relishable path of devotion. Sridhara perceived and worshipped - in his compositions *Akhyasashthi* and *Dayasataka* - the name of Lord Siva as the very Mother Goddess. His disciples adored this element of devotion in their guru, Sridhara.

Ayyaval was, like all householder Vedic rishis, always in a state of intense absorption, samadhi. He perceived the same divine substance- the same Atman - in all beings, animate or inanimate. As a result he was

blessed with many yogic powers or siddhis. God, it is said, instantly responded to his call. There were many who were beneficiaries of his miraculous powers. Since the miracles he performed were orally communicated - in an unbroken way - for generation, they were finally recorded in writing. Sridhara was full of a compassionate temperament. Once when there was acute drought, the farmers implored that he should rescue them from the calamity. He chanted the Kulirashtaka Stotra and brought rains to that region. He rescued a child from the jaws of imminent death, by reciting the Taravali Stotra. Among the many miracles he performed, some are mentioned below :

(1) A rich man of Tiruvisanallur performed the ceremony of Radha Kalyanam in his house. He invited Sridhara a devotee of Siva, along with the Bhajan group of Marudanallur. Sridhara enquired whether his won followers - his own group of singers - could also come sending a message through one of his disciples. Since Sridhara was a devotee of Siva, the rich man began the ceremonies, without caring to wait for Sridhara. The disciple returned and told his guru about this. Sridhara was disappointed and asked his disciples to go back to their homes. But some stayed back, keen to observe what would happen.

As the procession reached his home, Sridhara Ayyaval praised Sri Krishna with a sloka and devoutly invited Him inside, to his pooja room. Instantly, the picture of Sri Krishna disappeared from the portrait kept in the chariot of the procession and manifested itself in the pooja room of Ayyaval. The onlookers were dumbstruck at this miraculous event. The rich man fell at the feet of Sridhara and craved his forgiveness. He forgave him and as soon as he prayed to Sri Krishna, His picture appeared in the procession portrait, exactly as before. The procession continued. Ayyaval's devotion never had any use for differentiation between Siva and Kesava.

(2) Everyday Ayyaval used to go to Tiruvidamarudur, to worship his chosen Deity, Sri Mahalingeswara Swami. Once, in the month of October (Thula, according to Hindu calendar), there was a huge flood in Kaveri river. Unable to swim across and worship Mahalingeswara in the temple

situated on the other shore, he remained there only, in the direction of the temple, and returned home after hearing the closing bells of the temple. He worshipped his chosen deity with all devotion, as usual. He felt joyous, as joyous as he used to feel going to the temple - though he remained where he was, this side of the river. In the middle of the night Mahalingaswami came to his place in the form of the temple priest and gave him prasad.

Sridhara thanked him for bringing prasad even at such a later hour and asked him to stay back. Since it was a very cold night, he gave the priest (Lord) the green-coloured shawl which Shahaji gave him and told him to sleep there - in his home itself - so that they could both go to the temple in the morning. When he got up in the morning, there was no trace at all of the priest. Sridhara's wife, on enquiry, told him that she knew nothing, The door of the house was bolted from inside as before.

Ayyaval wondered how this was possible. Finishing his morning duties, he went to the temple, and noticed that its door remained closed still. The priest was seen just coming to open them. Sridhara asked him why he did not tell him when he left his home. The priest was speechless and recovering told him that he never came to his place in the night. Both of them were surprised, indeed stunned. Finally, the priest opened that temple door. Both of them went inside the garbhagriha, the sanctum sanctorum. They saw a scene which cannot be explained by all our srutis and smritis, our sacred scriptures. Mahalingaswami was there wrapped in the shawl that Sridhara gave him in the night before. Tears of intense devotion flowed like Ganga from Sridhara's eyes. Praising his chosen deity, Ayyaval went back.

(3) Ayyaval was a great sage-householder. After doing his morning and evening worship he used to be, for hours together, immersed in the state of samadhi. Often he used to be in that state continuously for two or three days. His wife or his disciples never disturbed him in that state, and he didn't go to the gurukula whenever he was in that state. Once Mahalingaswami Himself went in disguise as Ayyaval and taught the students. The students were struck by the remarkable way in which

their teacher taught them that day. The next day Ayyaval came to teach and started the lesson which he stopped teaching earlier. The students told him that since he had already finished teaching it the previous day he should begin a new lesson. Immediately, Ayyaval with his interior vision realised that it was the playful act of his Lord Mahalingaswami. And he rejoiced at the good fortune of his students to be taught by Paramasiva Himself.

(4) In those days, dacoits used to rob people after warning them about it. They stole grain after harvesting was done. And they used to loot grain and money from the houses. One day the dacoit leader sent word that he was coming to Tiruvisanallur for looting whatever they wanted. The villagers were terrified and sought the protection of Ayyaval. He asked them to join their bhajan group on the banks of Kaveri for group bhajan of the Divine Name. The poor and the middle class people joined the bhajan. The rich were immersed in bundling and hiding their ornaments etc. The dacoits arrived, robbed whatever they could lay their hands on and on their way back saw Ayyaval and the people doing bhajan on the banks of the river. The gang leader was attracted by the intense devotion of Ayyaval and offered a substantial amount of what they robbed to him with humility and reverence. He asked him to take it as dakshina sacred offering. Ayyaval got Nagabharana made with that amount and adorned Mahalingaswami. This Nagabharana can be seen adorning the deity even today.

(5) Once Ayyaval was expounding Tulapurana in the month of Tula (October), in which river Kaveri prays to Lord Siva to consider her also a s equal to river Ganga. The exposition of the Purana went on for a week in a small old mantap on the way to the river Kaveri. On the last day, Ayyaval had an intuitive warning that that mantap will collapse on that very day Even as the concluding session was over Ayyaval walked out of the mantap, along with the listeners and disciples. As soon as they stepped out, the mantap collapsed with a bang. None was hurt and Ayyaval knew that this was Siva's grace and he prayed to him expressing their gratitude The ruler Shahji came to know about this and in the very place

of the old mantap got a new one built.

(6) There were many disciples who studied under Ayyaval and learnt various subjects. One among them was a householder. He was extremely poor and was unable to study while leading a householder's life. Nagged by his shrewish wife, he decided to abandon his studies and go to a neighbouring village to eke out a living. He told his predicament to his guru who agreed to this and bid him farewell. As a farewell gift he gave him a colored gourd - Cucurbitapepo (known in Telugu as "Boodida gummadikaya"). The wife made fun of the guru who gave such a (in her view) useless gift and the disciple who accepted it. The couple left the place and went to a neighbouring village. Before entering the new place, as is the custom, they made a young brahmachari (celibate young man) break that gourd at the entrance to their new dwelling. The wife again mocked at the gift which, she sarcastically said, came in handy at least for this purpose.

But, lo and behold, gold coins began pouring from inside the broken gourd. The couple's eyes were dazzled at this sight. The disciple rushed back to his guru, along with his wife, and told him about this miracle. This is an example to prove that God listens to the prayers of 'Gurus' for protecting the ordinary folk and comes to their succour.

(7) The residents of Tiruvisanallur considered Sridhara Venkatesa Ayyaval as the Incarnation of Siva himself. This was because of the several miracles and siddhis he performed. Even to this day, a special function is got up to celebrate the emergence of river Ganga in Ayyaval's house well due to his miraculous powers. The incidents proclaim that Ayyaval was a great reformer and prophet who irrespective of caste, creed and colour showed to all love and affection. They also, therefore, consider him as a prophet of humanisitic values.

Once Ayyaval was performing annual sraddha ceremony for his father. Cooking was over and the priests who had to partake of the food also came. Ayyaval went to the Kaveri river for a bath. On the way he saw a low - caste man stricken with hunger and thirst, about to die.

Immediately, Ayyaval poured some water in his mouth from his vessel, disregarding the notions that he was a lowcaste man while he was himself a Brahmin. Ayyaval then rushed back and brought the ritual food and fed the untouchable who was hovering on the brink of death.

The Brahmin guests enraged at this sacrilegious act, left Ayyaval's house and spread this news among the Brahmins in the village. In the social conditions existing at that time, Ayyaval's was indeed a revolutionary act. Since the Brahmin priests left the ceremony came to a standstill. Ayyaval, feeling helpless, prayed to his deity Siva. Just before sunset Lord Siva Himself sent two priests and got the ceremony completed without a hitch. The two priests were none other than Vinayaka and Skanda. In spite of this, the Brahmins of Tiruvisanallur imposed a punishment for his heretical act. They declared that Ayyaval should do one of two things. Either go to Kashi and have a bath in the Ganga, as a purificatory act, or leave the village forever. The Brahmin scholars argued that however great a scholar or a great saint Ayyaval was, to feed an untouchable before the Brahmins partaking it after the sacred ceremony, is a defiance of the scriptural injunctions and therefore an inexcusable heretical action.

Ayyaval had no one to fall back upon than his own Lord and Master, Siva. His prayers were answered, and Mother Ganga appeared to him in a dream saying that she will appear in the well inside the compound of their house on the full moon day of Kartik. Ayyaval woke up with joy at this revelation. He prayed to Mother Ganga and recited Gangashtaka and other hymns imploring her to descend at his place. As predicted in the dream, on Kartik full moon day, Ganga water came swelling up from the ground in Ayyaval's well. This extraordinary event was witnessed by believers and sceptics and agnostics. They all realised the greatness and spiritual power of Ayyaval. A celebration is held in Tiruvisanallur to this day commemorating this great event by the devotees of Sridhara. Several religious activities such as Harikathas, devotional music concerts, etc., are held. Ayyaval is worshipped with intense faith and devotion.

However, the way in which Ayyaval gave up his body and brought his life to a close, is the most wonderful event. His wife died much before but Ayyaval lived for a long time. Ayyaval informed his devotees about his passing away much before. And told them that no sorrow or grief should be expressed at his passing away. He exhorted them to propagate his message to future generations and a life of equality in the eyes of God without any distinctions of high or low, of caste, creed and color should be shown as the ideal for all. One day he crossed the river Kaveri, and went to Tiruvidamardudur to worship his deity Mahalingaswami. He entered the sanctum sanctorum and disappeared. Like the great devotee Andal who merged herself in Lord Sri Ranganatha, Ayyaval dissolved himself in Mahalingeswaraswami.

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1. Prof. V. Raghavan, Telugu Encyclopedia III, 1951.
2. R Krishna Murti, Saints of Cauvery Delta , 1979.

12. GUNTUR NALLA MASTAN (1685-1895)

A person getting drowned in the waves of Ganges river or the turbulent waves of the sea is helpless, overwhelmed. Likewise a person who is fully immersed in the Ganga of devotion, (bhakti) or the ocean of self-knowledge (Jnana) is overwhelmed by the experience. The language, dress, acts and behaviour of such people appear strange to the so-called cultured or refined people. The worldly people call them "mad people". Among such divinely "mad" people Guntur Nallamastan is a supreme example. He was a Muslim Avadhuta, sage. In Urdu language "Mastan" means "divinely intoxicated". There were many such Muslim yogis and divinely inebriated ones in Andhra. There was one Mastan in Dharmavaram in Anantapur district, in Guntakal there was another. Similarly Mastans were found in Kasumuru near Nellore, in Gokavaram, twenty miles away from Rajahmundry, on the Parada mountain near Visakhapatnam, in Kothapet in Pattikonda Taluk, Karnool Dist.

Our present Mastan was a resident of Guntur. Perhaps he had a dark complexion. That could be the reason why he was called Nalla Mastan: "Nalla" means, in Telugu, 'dark' or black. In Guntur and Nellore districts, parents name, their offspring as "Mastanayya" or "Mastanamma" with great respect, for such yogis (respectively, male and female). This Mastanvali was born in the Syed family in Tiruchinapalli in Tamilnadu and spent his boyhood there; From boyhood itself, he was divinely intoxicated. He left home in boyhood itself, and roaming around - in towns, villages, - settled in a forest did intense tapas and achieved the pinnacle of self-realization. We do not know clearly about his roaming as a mad mendicant - Avadhuta - but he settled in the outskirts of Guntur when he was more than a hundred years old, and attained samadhi there. We do not know the date of his birth but it is a well-established fact that he passed away on 23-5-1895. One scholar P. Veeraraghavudu who wrote a book on Andhra saints says, on the basis of the evidence of people who were alive and had darshan of Nalla Mastan considers and

that Nalla Mastan lived for 250 years, or at least 200 years. Therefore, one can state his date of birth to be around 1685.

One Shaik Madar Sahib, belonging to Pamuru in Nellore district served Mastan Vali since 1880 and after his death (Nalla Mastan), for a long time looked after the saint's darga and performed regular worship there. But the Shaik himself died around 1920. It is through this Madar Sahib that many details about Nalla Mastan came to light. Mastan used to roam aimlessly like a mad fellow. In the early days, he used to carry a bamboo pole balance. In one counter of the balance, there was a heap of broken stones, collected at random. The other counter contained a mound of tattered clothes. One goat and two cocks always were with him. We do not know whether by holding the balance, Mastan Vali carried the enormous weights of the sins that people committed, just like Jesus Christ who carried on the cross the sins of humanity. A Muslim merchant who lived in Kadapa realised that Mastan was a great sage and distressed that he was lying uncared for under the shade of a tree or a snake pit, bought a house in Sangadigunta area of Guntur and presented it to the Vali. The sage along with some disciples lived in that house for some time. Even now materials for the worship of Mastan Vali at his darga come from that house. Vali was ever-awake and never slept. No one had seen him sleeping. He was constantly roaming or sitting or immersed in meditation. He never laid his body to rest.

In the early days of his stay in Guntur, Nalla Mastan stayed under a drum-stick tree near a hospital. One day when he was sitting under the tree, there was torrential rain with tremendous thunder and lightning. Vali's goat was grazing near, and died when a thunderbolt struck it fatally. A person who was working at some distance also died. But strangely there was absolutely no rain where Mastan Vali sat. He was not drenched or experienced any difficulty. People who saw him felt that he was immersed in yogic sleep. After the rain abated, people came and were stunned to see that not even a drop of water touched Mastan Vali.

The sage became conscious - as he emerged from deep samadhi -

and found that the goat so dear to him was dead. He then went and sat near the goat, closed his eyes in meditation, went round the dead goat thrice, and touching it, said: "Get up!" The goat got up as if from sleep, shook off the raindrops from her body and settled between the legs of the sage! People who watched this, extolled the sage's divine powers and spread far and wide this extraordinary news. Hearing this, the dead man's mother came, fell at the feet of the sage and crying piteously implored him to bring back his son to life. An ocean of compassion, Vali got up, went round the dead body and as soon as he touched it with his divine hands, the man got up, alive. The spectators were overwhelmed with devotion and prostrated at the feet of the Muslim sage. But he himself remained silent.

Another and a similar incident testifies to the divine, supernatural powers of the Vali. A Rajput lady, Bhavani by name, stole the Vali's hen, killed it and cut it to small pieces which she kept in the kitchen for cooking. After roaming about, Vali returned to his cottage and found the hen missing. By his omniscient vision, he found out what had happened. A sage of deep compassion Mastan went to Bhavani's house and looked at the meat pieces, saying "Bo Bo' - exhorting the hen to come out. The hen came back to life and Mastan Vali took it and caressed it tenderly. Seeing this, the lady was terrified and imploring his forgiveness fell at his feet. Ever since that incident, the lady took the vow of nonviolence and devotedly served Nalla Mastan. This incident happened in 1887, that is eight years before he entered samadhi.

Mastan Vali was an adept in Yoga, (specially Hatha yoga). Once in the field of a Vaishya in Nallapadu village he saw the dismembered head, trunk, hands and legs of Vali lying scattered in his field. The merchant was terrified and ran to the village to bring the villagers to show them this bizarre scene. But by the time he returned Vali was seen sitting as usual. The villagers made fun of the Vaishya and Mastan Vali, smilingly asked him: "Were you terrified?" Nallapadu villagers asked the sage to stay in their village but declining the invitation, he went back to Guntur. This is called "Dismemberment Yoga" - "Khanda Yoga" -. Such an incident is

recorded in the lives of Shirdi Sai Baba, Mouna Swami, Vadarevu Lalitananda Saraswati, Chirala Avadhuta, Kadapa Avadhutendra Swami.

There was another instance in which the Vali showed this “Khanda Yoga.” One day he stood before a shop wearing only a loin cloth. He was seen making grotesque gestures and even his body appeared grotesque. The owner of the shop was disgusted by this and asked Vali to stop the nonsense and leave. Mastan didn’t hear this and the owner got angry and again scolded him, and asked him to move away from there. Even then Vali didn’t respond and remained inert, and did not move from there. The merchant became mad with anger. With his walking stick he assaulted the Saint. At that blow, the Saint’s body got dismembered, and the different parts of his body fell at various places at random. The merchant was filled with terror and seeing this the people gathered. Police arrived and after enquiring about his incident, arrested the merchant and imprisoned him. The people gathered the scattered pieces of Vali’s body and took them to the burial ground for cremation. But as soon as they reached the Smashan they saw Vali assuming the natural form of his body, all its dismembered pieces attaching themselves to each other as before. The villagers and corpse-bearers who saw this miracle, ran to the police station and told them about this. The police came, saw Vali in his full form as before, and released the merchant from the prison.

During the time Mastan Vali was in Guntur, Unnava Nandayya, at the behest of his guru, Jnanayogi Paparaju of Polur village, came to Guntur to have Mastan Vali’s darshan. When he went and saw him, Vali was in a state of deep inner absorption, with eyes indrawn. Before him sat an extremely poor old, sick man, waiting for Vali’s grace. After half an hour the saint opened his eyes, looked at the old man and gave him his blessings. Then he turned to Nandayya and said: “Give this old man the four annas you have.” Nandayya was having exactly four annas with him. He was wonderstruck at the Saint’s omniscience and gave the four annas to the sick man. Mastan felt happy and asked Nandayya: “Were you not sent here by Paparaju?”. Nandayya’s wonder got doubled. He was amazed

that without making enquiries, Mastan Vali knew that he had exactly four annas on him and, moreover, knew who had sent him to have his darshan. With wonder and adoration, he gazed at the saint steadily. Then Master said : "Paparaju is a very good man. In Hindu household on the day of father's death ceremony, until the priests are given food, no one else can be offered food. But Paparaju gave me food even before it was offered to the priests on the day of his father's death ceremony." One is reminded of a similar incident in the Guru Charitra. According to that story, a devout couple Sumati and Appalaraju, living in Pithapuram on the day of a Sradha, a ceremony, fed a mendicant even before the priests were fed and with the blessings of that mendicant had the inestimable fortune of having Dattatreya himself as their son! How fortunate, similarly must be Paparaju to have the good fortune of offering food to Nalla Mastan!

One more example for the omniscient powers of Mastan Vali. A pilgrim from Guntur once visited Kasi. He took his dip in the Ganga, worshipped Viswanath and went round the city seeing all the landmarks. There he saw an old man sitting before a big mosque. He beckoned to the Guntur pilgrim to come near and when he came, asked him: "You belong to Guntur? Don't you?" Thinking that the old man must have seen him in Guntur, the pilgrim replied, "Yes". But when the old man again asked "Is my friend in Guntur doing well?" the pilgrim was surprised and asked: "Who is your friend?" The old man replied: "Mastan Vali. It is nearly two hundred years since I saw him. He is my boyhood friend." The pilgrim was surprised and told him about the welfare of Mastan Vali. Wondering how old the old man must be if they were boyhood friends, he prostrated to the old man with fear and surprise and went his way.

Feeling happy that an old man two hundred years old, an absolute stranger, had recognized him as the native of Guntur, he returned to Guntoor and immediately went to have darshan of Mastan Vali. The Saint was in deep samadhi and many were waiting. Along with them the pilgrim also waited. After an hour, Mastan Vali regained normal consciousness and listening to the various problems of the waiting devotees, blessed them and sent them away. Then he turned to the pilgrim and said: "Did

my friend? My friend in Kasi who enquired about my welfare, is he doing well?" The pilgrim, was filled with indescribable wonder at this, and prostrating to Mastan Vali said: "You are both omniscient, all knowing Mahatmas. You both excel each other! Were you not friends for the last two hundred years? I thought you were an ordinary Yogi. I didn't realize that you are such a great Mahatma! Kindly forgive my ignorance!" Mastan closed his eyes disinclined to hear anyone praising him. It is strange but true that even when there is a treasure trove in one's backyard and a celestial Kalpavriksha, the Wish-fulfilling Tree in one's front yard we do not recognize it. Only Mahatmas can cognise other Mahatmas!

Another instance to show that Mastan Vali could do and undo anything with his mere sankalpa is : One young Muslim man used to follow the Saint wherever he went and used to mock him as a mad fellow. Even when the Muslim elders tried to control his erratic behaviour, it was futile and the young fellow began shouting at the top of his voice saying, "Mastan Vali is a mad fellow! a mad fellow!" For three days he went on repeating that the Saint was a mad man and eventually he himself became mad, lost his sanity. His parents came to know the reason, took the miscreant son and made him fall at the feet of the great Saint whom he used to mock. An ocean of mercy, Vali kept his hand on the young fellow's mouth and his insane prattling ceased. He became normal. He fell at the feet of the sage with fear and faith and received his blessings.

One day Mastan Vali went to Bejawada (Vijayawada, now). He saw a group of elderly Muslims talking among themselves, went to them and telling them that he was on his way to Mecca, requested them to keep his bag until he collects it on his way back. He then left. "Where is Mecca and where is Vijayawada! This fellow must be out of his mind," thought the elders. For a long time they went on with their gossiping. After two hours Mastan Vali returned to take back the basket. The elders, convinced that he was a mad fellow, asked him with their tongue in cheek: "So you went to Mecca? Good! What is the news there? Is everything all right?" In this vein they made fun of him. Unruffled, Vali said that he had been to Mecca, that a great festival was going on there and that many sages and

saints came to see it! He described the details vividly but none of them believed his words. Some elders noted the time and date and to check sent a message to people they knew in Mecca about this and queried whether Mastan Vali was really seen there. They got the reply that among the renowned sages who were there for the grand event, Guntur Nalla Mastan was certainly one! The Muslims in Vijayawada realised that Mastan Vali was an incarnation of Prophet Muhammad Himself and took him in a grand procession through the streets of Bejawada. It is also said that Mastan Vali often went to the home of his contemporary the great yogi Peeroji Maharshi (1829 -1889) of Sattenpalli and take his food there. Thus his Mecca pilgrimage and his visits to Peeroji Maharshi are instances of Mastan Vali's Kama gamana psychic powers of aerial journeys going at will and disappearance.

A religious preacher by name Noor Mustafakhadar belonging to the Nizam state used to travel all over the country and propagate Islam. Once he went to Guntur. The Muslims there told the preacher about Mastan Vali: that he was a great sage, speaks only one or two words to the countless visitors and remains mostly in deep absorption, that he has conquered sleep, was a realised sage with great siddhis. They told him that hundreds of devotees, both Hindus and Muslims wait for hours together for his darshan. A fanatical man, Khader denied that he was a saint and all the miracles that the Vali does are the devil's actions. So saying he abused Nalla Mastan, to show his pretentious scholarship. He challenged Mastan that if he was a true Muslim he should argue with him on the principles of Islam and show his genuine sainthood.

The disciples of Mastan brought their guru to his presence. Khader recited some verses from the Koran and asked Mastan to explain their meaning. With genuine humility, Mastan told him that he did not know the meaning and also pointed out that there was no necessity to know their meaning and declared that he refused to enter into an argument. The priest was enraged and abused Mastan saying that how he could be a true Muslim without knowing the meaning of the verses in the Koran. The Muslim who knew the greatness of Mastan, told Khader that Mastan may not be a

great scholar but he was undoubtedly a great sage, a Mahatma, a yogi, and an ocean of compassion. Khader became much more violent and declared that a true follower of Islam has to know the subtle spiritual truths of the Koran and following their truths should propagate the Islamic religion far and wide. This, he declared, was the duty prescribed by prophet Muhammed, for all Muslims. When a devotee of Mastan argued about the great qualities of universal harmony, acceptance of other faiths, Khader declared that he had nothing to do with the religion of the Kafirs. He said that all the miracles that Mastan performed are merely the tricks of a magician. He would examine the so-called siddhis of Mastan and prove that they are all fakes. But he said in the process if any harm comes to Vali, he was not responsible. The disciples who are praising him to the skies alone were responsible. The disciples who knew the great powers of Mastan agreed to these conditions. When Mastan was in a deep state of absorption-samadhi-he got a severely hot pail of oil poured on Vali's head. But Vali's samadhi state was not disturbed and no harm came to him. Khader was mortally afraid. He waited until Vali returned to consciousness from his samadhi, fell at his feet and craved his pardon. He became his disciple and going back to the Nizam state he spread the life and teachings of Mastan Vali widely.

A woman belonging to Vinukonda, did not have children for a long time and went to Mastan Vali seeking his blessings in this regard. She praised him as a celestial cow - Kamadhenu - that yields the milk of fulfillment of the desires of devotees and sought his blessing. Overcome with compassion at her plight and moved by her devotion and faith Vali told her: "Go back to your place. You shall be blessed with a male child!" She went back became pregnant and in due course gave birth to a cute male child. After two months she started for Guntur to express her gratitude to the Master, but in Vinukonda Station itself she had darshan of the Master. She fell at his feet and kept the child there, expressing her immense gratitude to him for blessing her with a child. Mastan told her: "Go to Guntur. A big function is being held there." Accordingly she reached Guntur but to her dismay came to know that Mastan Vali passed away that very morning and a big procession was being taken out for his

cremation. She was overwhelmed with unbearable grief and ran to have darshan of the Vali. She was stunned: Only two hours earlier she had darshan of Vali. hale and hearty. If he passed away in the morning how was it possible for her to have his darshan at Vinukonda Railway Station. She realised the extraordinary power and compassion of Vali and wept inconsolably. Her God. she knew had disappeared.

She recovered and told the devotees there how she has the darshan of their Master at Vinukonda Railway Station a few hours earlier, She felt that she must have seen someone resembling Mastan Vali. She returned and looked about for him in the Station and asked the people there whether they had seen someone resembling Vali. They said that they had never seen a person like that at any time. She realised the strange fact that out of compassion and concern for his devotees, the Master even after leaving the body appeared physically to her. It seems such a phenomenon was seen for some more days. Such strange incidents are seen in the lives of other masters, too, such as Shirdi Sai Baba, Pakalapati Guru and Chirala Avadhuta.

It was announced in the surrounding villages that the Master would leave his body' on 23.5.1895, five days before. Thousands of devotees arrived at Guntur. At 10'o lock in the morning, the Master made a gesture with his legs and passed away. When cremation arrangements were being made in the land given by' a devotee, Nagaram Picchayya the Health Officer of the town prohibited it saying that such a thing cannot be done within the precincts of the town. Arguments for and against went until 4'o clock in the evening. Many devotees had come from distant places and they' had to return after seeing the obsequies. Because of the stubbornness of the Health Officer, it was now impossible. In the meantime, the Officer developed severe stomachache. An Englishman Gill intererfered and the Health Official's eyes were opened to the mystery. He realised the great mystery and gave his permission. His stomach ache instantly subsided. Only in distress one's inner vision and awareness are activated!

Before doing the cremation when they lifted the covering cloth on Vali's face, they saw that it was vibrant and radiant as before. They kept a huge boulder on the samadi place and built a tomb. After that, the devotees built huge edifices there. Nalla Mastan's Darga in Guntur is a sacred place for both Muslims and Hindus. We offered our prayers at this Durga on 15.5.1993, and many times after.

Source :

P Veeraraghavudu; Andhra Mahabhaktha Vijayamu 1957.

13. SORAKAYALA SWAMI (1700 - 1902)

Narayanavaram in Chittoor district was the capital of Tondaman kings. It was in this Narayanavaram that the marriage of Padmavathi - daughter of Akasa Raju-and Srinivasa took place. At the request of his father-in-law, Srinivasa settled in Narayanavaram and continues to bless countless devotees. In the hills and valleys of this place dwell many saints and sages, yogis and siddhas. Sorakayala Swami who did tapas and attained Mahasamadhi in 1902 is one among those. No one knows the ancestry of this sage and no definite information about his birth and parents is available. Similarly we do not know who brought him up. However, when the Swami came to Madras in 1902 he was asked by Subbaravamma in Yatirajulu Naidu's house (she was Naidu's sister), the Swami said that he was 500 years old. However, according to the information available in the records of the choultry constructed at Puttur by Komaleswarapuram Srinivasapillai in the middle of the 18th century, historians state that he was born around 1700. He was born in a very poor family in a village near Tirupati and he was called Ramaswami. When he was roaming in the forests nearby looking after goats and sheep, a great yogi saw him and initiated him with a mantra. Ever since Ramaswami's ties with the world were snapped. This is the legend among people. He confined his roaming to the surrounding areas. Mostly he roamed in the forests and if he felt hungry, he used to come to any village and beg for alms. The contemporaries, seeing his strange behavior thought he was mad. His attire also strengthened this impression. He had a bundle of clothes on his shoulder, a turban on his head made of coarse, dirty cloth, a tom dhoti which never went beyond the knees, two dogs tied to a rope woven with tom cloth in one hand, and a balancing pole with a pot meant for urine and faeces, on one side and on the otherside hollow bottlegourds meant for holding water and food. This was his appearance and it was comparable to the appearance of a decorated bull which is taken round villages. Seeing this bizarre appearance, it was only natural that people branded him as insane. But as his siddhis began to manifest themselves gradually, they called him "Sorakayalaswami" (Sorakaya=bottle gourd),

when he invariably had sacred fire wherever he was, they hailed him as an incarnation of Dattatreya.

Sorakayalaswami had a short stature with dusky complexion. Matted hair, long bushy beard, with a knot at its end, thick eyebrows, long nails which were never cut, scintillating, deep-seated, inward looking eyes, a majestic, serious face, and conversing either with himself or with others in Tamil and expressing truths in the form of folk tales with multiple meanings - these were the features of the Swami. Though he was more than 200 years old, he always appeared much younger. Though he was in rags and a bizarre attire his face had the radiance of a Brahmajnani. His eyes used to radiate supernatural powers. His words were always cryptic, and were not comprehended easily. Mostly he was alone, though often he used to come to the succour of the distressed and the destitute with his infinite love. He used to cure chronic diseases giving to the sick, twigs and leaves or particles of food he took or a drop of water he drank. He used to caution those who surrendered to him about impending calamities and infused strength to bear them. If the calamity was unavoidable, and strong, he wept for them.

We do not know to which tradition the Swami belonged. Truth, compassion and selfless service to others was his religion. A fire always blazed - a dhuni - in his presence. Devotees used to apply tilak on his face, according to their own religious denominations. By word and deed, he always propagated universal ethical principles. He taught his disciples that not only towards humans but towards every living being they should show compassion. Compassion towards all beings was the Swami's nerve center. For him food, whether it was a royal, sumptuous meal or the simple gruel of poor people, was meant only for appeasing one's hunger, and not for relishing their exquisite taste. Whatever food or delicacies devotees brought he distributed them among the devotees. He never advocated torturing the body by ritual fasts, etc. He used to reveal the secrets of yoga vidya only to those who were qualified to receive them. He had precognitive powers of the three dimensions of time, past, present and future. Sometimes he had fits of intense anger. But he became peaceful in no time. Tears and laughter alternated without any intermission. He

was an extremely agile, speedy jogger. Any length, any distance, he always went by walk. A large part of his life oscillated between Narayanavaram and Nagalapuram. In the last years of his life, he visited Madras four or five times. Devotees and disciples called him "Swami". The rest called him Thata (grandpa) or "Sorakayala Thata."

Avadhutas, yogis and siddhapurushas mostly desire solitude. Many regard them as insane and ignore them. However, they gain some recognition by removing the grief and sorrow of the distressed. When knowledgeable, insightful people realize and recognize their greatness, sages such as this Swami get widely noticed. It was S. Ratnasabhupati Pillai who, as an engineer, was staying in Narayanavaram who made Sorakayalashwami's name widely known as a great sage. His friends were Narayanaswami Naidu and Chengalvaraya Mudaliar. These three came to know about the Swami through Sundara Subbarayulu Naidu. From that day onwards they were with the Swami serving him with devotion and dedication. Among the three Chengalvaraya Mudaliar was a lifelong devotee. One day Mudaliar followed the Swami into a deep jungle. There the Swami, circumambulating the Linga there gave to Mudaliar the rope which tied the dogs together. He was amazed to see twice the dog very near to him and at a great distance. Once these friends offered bhiksha to the Swami. Then the Swami said, "I shall go towards east and you go towards the west." What the Swami meant became clear when within two days, he got transferred to Chittoor.

Sorakayalashwami performed many miracles. They reflected his compassion and love and they were not meant to exhibit his greatness. He looked upon all beings in the same way. If he saw anyone beating animals, he cried loudly and sent one of his devotees to stop the cruelty against animals. He used to tell about their previous birth. Once he said concerning a dog: "He is a shepherd. He used to look after cattle along with me. We were both looking after cattle, Alas! he became like this!" Another day when the Swami was roaming in a forest, he found a lamb which was wounded in the leg. The Swami massaged the leg, applied some medicinal bandage to it, protected it until it was completely cured **and then left** it in the group of lambs to which it belonged. Another time

he found an ass crying piteously with a broken leg. He bandaged the leg, gave food and looked after it for a month until it regained its strength and health. One day unexpectedly, he told Mudaliar, "He is starving without food. Let's go and give him some food". They went out and stood before a house. The Swami showed a bull and said he came only for him. Mudaliar called the owner who informed them that for some days the bull was stricken with some disease and was refusing to eat or even drink water and thereby becoming weak day by day. The Swami went round the animal and ordered it to take food. Immediately it started eating and drank water.

There were countless cases in which the Swami came to the rescue of the affected, the sick and the needy. One woman used to sit near a dilapidated temple: she was stricken with leprosy and blood used to swell and drop from the sores. And the spectacle she presented was revolting. The Swami applied oil to the sores and gave food from the bhiksha he got and indeed fed her himself. Similarly, another woman living in Mullah Sahib Street in Chennai had the terrifying leprosy. She went to Narayanavaram and stayed in the presence of the Swami for a few days. One day, unexpectedly the Swami took a fistful of food and gave it to the woman. Within a week she was totally cured of her leprosy. In the famine days between 1876-77, 15-20 orphan children were living with the Swami. The Swami fed them first and only then took his food. Once the Swami was sitting under a tamarind tree. It was midday and summer season. An old lady arrived there along with her granddaughter. The girl was suffering from choline fever and her body was reduced to bare bones. Most eminent doctors declared that she would not survive. The Swami felt infinite compassion for the child and picking up a handful of earth, made her eat it. Soon the severity of the fever abated. Within two months she regained her full health.

When necessary, the Swami controlled both living beings and the five elements. Once two devotees called AravamuduNaidu and Parthasarathi Naidu came down from Madras and had darshan of the Swami in a village. Then they hired a cart to go to Narayanavaram. When they were about to get into the cart, they heard a voice saying,

“Mother! Children are starting off. Don’t allow them to be drenched.” They didn’t know who spoke in that way. Along with the Swami they sat in the cart. Mudaliyar was walking behind the cart. After going some distance it rained heavily but not a drop fell on the cart or on Mudaliyar. This marvel continued until they reached Narayanavaram. One night Chengalvaraya Mudaliyar and the Swami were sleeping on the pyal of a house. As mosquitoes began biting, Mudaliyar got up, unable to sleep. “What’s the matter,” the Swami asked. “Mosquito menace!” replied Mudaliyar. The Swami sat cross-legged and moved the right hand in a circle and asked Mudaliyar to go to sleep. Not a single mosquito from that moment bothered that devotee. He had sound sleep.

A gentleman from Madras came to Narayanavaram and with the intention of feeding the poor was supervising the cooking arrangements he made. This was in the house of Papayya Chetty. Unexpectedly Chetti’s wife died at that very moment. The gentleman, a devotee of the Swami was totally upset and went to the Swami regretting that all the preparation of food have been rendered unclean and unholy. The Swami said that the preparation of food have been rendered unclean and unholy. The woman has not yet passed away and asked him to go and see. The woman supposed to be dead came back to life and asked them to speed up the shifting of all the items of food, since she will not live for more than half an hour. As soon as all the items of food were shifted to the Swami’s presence, that very minute Chetty’s wife breathed her last. This made known to all the Swami’s amazing capacity to control the powers of nature. There was a bench clerk, in the Madras Small Causes Court, by name V. Yatirajulu Naidu. His father and uncle were great devotees of the Swami. One day in 1889, Yatirajulu Naidu, while walking in his garden in the night was bitten by an extremely poisonous snake. Immediately Naidu began meditating on the Swami. The Swami appeared twice patted him on the back and disappeared. Without any incantations or medicines the poison lost its effect. Where was Narayanavaram and where Madras? But the Swami transcends time and space.

There are many instances to prove the Swam’s powers of precognition and omniscience. They were the Swami’s natural powers and he used them only for the welfare of others. One day in the course of begging for

alms, the Swami stood before a house and called out "Kamakshi! Mangai!" many times. When a woman with unkempt hair appeared, the Swami asked her to give biksha. She refused to give anything and went on abusing the Swami vehemently. Disregarding this, the Swami repeated his plea for alms. "At least give me some curry!" the Swami asked. The woman denied any such thing being available and shouted, again, at him to go away. The Swami smiled and said: "You've prepared a nice curry and have hidden it in that corner. Why are you lying?" The woman was amazed at the Swami's omniscience and went, brought some curry and gave it to him. One day when the Swami went to Papayya Chetty's house he brought a black gram cake and gave it to him. The Swami said: "You kept 18 such rotis in your house and you are giving me only one!" Chetty went inside and counted the number of rotis. Finding that they were literally 18, he was stunned.

One day the Swami was bathing in the river in Narayanavaram along with Mudaliyar. Suddenly he went on wringing his hands with sorrow, exclaiming, "What a pity! My friend died! What shall I do?" Mudaliyar didn't understand anything. He came to know later: that during those very minutes the Swami expressed his grief, a sage by name Chatti Paradesi, disciple of Thobha Swami, belonging to Madras passed away. The samadhi of the great sage and that of his disciple, Kannu Kutti Swami are now in a state of utter neglect in Tiruvottiyur.

Those were the days when the Swami was roaming in the village Kuppam. Chengalvaraya Mudaliyar and Thoke Narayana Swami Naidu came there and had his darshan. For cooking their meals they could not even get a clay pot. The Swami observed this and told them: "Go and ask in that hut! Though she will say again and again that she doesn't have a pot, ask again. Then she will say, 'go and see for yourself'. She herself doesn't know about the vessel which is there in the attic! You will get it! Go!" When they asked the old woman she said she did not have anything like a pot. When they repeatedly asked her, she replied. "OK you can go inside and search! If you find it, take it!" When they searched the attic, they found it exactly as the Swami had said. When she came to know about this, the old woman was amazed at the divine precognitive power of the Swami.

In another context, a huge piece of wood was required to repair the chariot, ratha of Lord Kalyana Venkateswara. In the forest surrounding the village they could not find any big tree which could provide the wood of the size they required. They searched every where but failed to get it. They then went and told the Swami their problem. Then the Swami indicated, in the very Narayanavaram forest, the exact spot where they would be able to get what they required. When they searched, they found exactly at the same spot, the tree of a size they required. The temple committee declared that this was a miracle of the great Swami. Mangamma and her mother, living in a village near Narayanavaram were great devotees of the Swami. The mother was an aged woman and realised that the last moments of her life were fast approaching. But she strongly desired that during the last moments she must have the sacred water administered to the dying, from the hands of the Swami himself. Mangamma was crying piteously that the last wish of her dying mother be fulfilled. But she didn't know where the Swami was. She meditated on him intently. In a split second the Swami appeared and poured his tirtham into the mouth of the dying woman. The old woman died peacefully, her desire fulfilled. All were surprised at the Swami's powers of omniscience and ability for astral travel. (Kama or Siddhagamana).

Wonderful were the yogic powers of the Swami. The Swami saved many women who were plagued by evil spirits. By his yogic powers and simply by giving his darshan, his touch, or his word he saved many people from the troubles created by evil powers. When the Swami commanded these spirits flew away. One day, in the evening time the Swami was sitting relaxed, on the verandah of Sundaram Chetty, smoking a cigar. Then four or five people brought a young woman tortured by a devil for quite a period of time. Chengalavaraya Mudaliar was also there with the Swami. The Swami asked Chengalavaraya to elicit the reason for the woman coming to him. The young woman said that she came at the command of the Swami himself. When she was asked for more details, she gave them roaring at the top of her voice. People gathered there hearing that fierce sound. When the Swami stood up suddenly and with a terrifying voice asked the demon who possessed the young woman. "Will you leave

forthwith or not?" Terrified by the commanding presence and his voice, the demon was subdued. And when the young woman was given the Swami's Vibhuti (sacred ash) she regained her normal consciousness and very soon recovered her health fully. Similarly the Swami saved a woman possessed by a fierce demon. Though she was defiant in the beginning the demon came round and the Swami rescued that woman from its evil influence. In 1901 when the Swami was staying at Ice House in Chennai, a woman possessed by an evil spirit, carrying a load of more than 70 to 80 pounds and uttering all kinds of gibberish, used to run in the streets. One day she came carrying a huge log of burning wood to the Swami. The Swami gave her a morsel of food he was taking and some water to drink. She fell down, losing her consciousness. After fifteen minutes she got up and the demon took to its heels.

There was an evil minded sorcerer by name Nallatthur Munuswami Sastri in a village called Damarapakam. He harassed by his black magic people whom he disliked and tortured innocent people. He went about arrogantly and defiantly and none could say or do anything against his evil powers. One day the Swami was moving about in the streets of that village and took out a matchstick to light his cigar. It was snuffed out and another also. Surprised, the Swami looked around and saw the sorcerer at some distance. "Ugh! You dog! Stay there only!" commanded the Swami and lighting the cigar went about his way. Munuswami Sastri remained frozen at that spot. He was immobile in that state for two days. His relatives came and craved the forgiveness of the Swami. Only when the Swami showed compassion was the sorcerer able to move and from that day onwards he lost all his magical powers.

T.C. Subbayyar was the Mamaldar (Tahasildar) of Karveti Nagarm. In 1885, as per the orders of the Maharaja of Karveti Nagaram, he took Madam Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott for the darshan of the Swami. On seeing them, the Swami remarked, "In the spiritual arena, so far, only the black crows used to do service. Now even the white crows are coming and helping them!" Just then Ayyar who had gone to the neighbouring house on some work was bitten by a scorpion. With uncontrollable pain he came to the Swami again who asked him to rub the spot with cow

dung. Immediately the pain vanished. The foreigners were dumbstruck at this miracle. The same Ayyar once fell sick and no medicine could give relief. The Swami made him eat a betel nut which he had in his hand at that moment. Soon Ayyar was restored to full health.

Until 1893 the Swami moved in between Nagalapuram in the north and Narayanavaram in the south. The Swami was cordially invited to visit Madras and bless Jnanambal, daughter of Ratnasabhapathi; who was getting married. In 1893 the Swami visited Madras for the first time. T. Bhaktavatsalam was the bridegroom. It was this Bhaktavatsalam who, at the behest of his father-in-law, collected the experiences of the devotees with the Swami and wrote a book, in 1911, entitled *The Sage of Narayanavaram*. Between 1893—1902 the Swami visited Madras four times. The police had to control the huge crowds of devotees who came for the darshan of the Swami in Madras. During his very first visit when the Swami was staying in the house of the marriage he cried strangely: "My younger brother is coming! My younger brother is coming!" After a few minutes a sage, Kannu Kuttiswami, came for the Swami's darshan.

During his second visit to Madras, the Swami met a Muslim saint and both exchanged views most cordially. The Swami, knowing that the Muslim saint was a descendant of the Navab who ruled the city, offered fruits and flowers to him as a mark of respect.

Countless were the miracles the Swami performed in Madras. To mention a few: Aravamudu Naidu had a carbuncle on his back which pained him a lot. The doctors declared that an operation had to be performed. Naidu became extremely weak and prayed to the Swami to heal him. Then the Swami pointed to a plant in front of him and asked Naidu to apply the juice of that plant to the carbuncle. When the wound healed, the surgeons were surprised and said that it was because of the powers of the Swami and not the medicinal properties of the plant.

In another case, the daughter of Dewan Bahadur Rajaratna Mudaliar became acutely ill. The Swami said that she will not live and she died within two days. One day at night time, the Swami wept loudly and

cried: "Go and save that poor woman! She is thinking of jumping into the tank and kill herself! Go quickly and save her!" The devotees ran and saved that woman who was thinking of committing suicide since she suffered from chronic asthma. In the year 1901, Rajagopala Naidu, the brother of B. Venugopala Naidu was bedridden for three months due to acute rheumatic pains. Within a week, he had to appear for examinations conducted by the Madras University. The doctors declared that he was not in a position to sit for the examination. The Swami went on his own to his house and touching the legs, directed that the paste of the neem tree leaves should be applied to the legs. By the third day the pains disappeared and on the seventh day he duly took his examination. The medicines that the Swami suggested were simple and inexpensive: sesame seeds oil, cotton seeds, tamarind fruit, neem leaves, salt, nalleru (*Vitis quadrangularis*) tulsi leaves, munaga leaves, (drumstick leaves) pepper rasam, clay on the road, river water, vibhuti, Kuthuru Budamaku, (*Bryonia Scabra* leaves) the plants he came across. With these ordinary things he used to cure diseases regarded as incurable. The cures, discerning people declare, are due not to these "medicines" but due to the yogic powers of the Swami.

Sages born with a mission voluntarily give up their body once their mission is fulfilled. Similar was the case with the Swami. He indicated the time of his exit much before it actually happened. The wife of Ratnasabhpathi Pillai came to Nrayanavaram four months before the Swami passed away. While returning she asked the Swami when she would have the privilege of his darshan again. The Swami replied, "They kept my photograph there. You can have darshan of that!" She realised that something was amiss, as she felt that was her last darshan. The Swami himself selected the place where he was to be cremated. He got it levelled and threw a pebble in one direction. Where the pebble fell on that very spot the Swami's Samadhi was built. In August 1902 the Swami came to Madras and after a week's stay he told his disciple Purushottama Naidu, "Let's hasten; we can't stay here even for a minute!" and started

for Narayanavaram. He prevented all the disciples from Madras who normally came back with him to Narayanavaram.

A miracle took place in the Madras Railway Station. As the disciples bid the Swami a farewell, the pseudo-modern railway officials made fun of the Swami. The Swami decided to teach a lesson to these so-called sceptics and mockers. The Madras - Bombay Mail was scheduled to depart at 6 'o clock. The Swami got into the train and without laying his walking stick on the grownd kept it in his hand. The guard gave the signal but the train was stalled, it did not move. When the railway officials were terribly worried, a mischievous glint appeared in the Swami's eyes. After some time, he held his walking stick straight and the train moved straightaway. "You are teaching a lesson to these pseudo moden people!" thought Purushathama Naidu and he looked at the Swami. A glimpse of compassion appeared in the Swami's eyes. The railway officials came to know the real reason for the stalling of the train and they rushed to the Swami and profusely apologized to him.

The Swami got off the train at Puttur, stayed there for the night and in the morning reached Narayanavaram along with the band of his disciples. The Swami sent Purushottama Naidu and Papaiah Chetty and told them, "Day after tomorrow I am going to my country!" But they didn't catch the meaning of the words. That night, saying that he had great thirst he drank a huge quantity of water. He took bath using 150 buckets of water. At 12 o' clock in the night, he sat facing the north and asked for a coconut and camphor. Naidu who understood the meaning of the Swami's words, told Chetty. He came and breaking a coconut, gave arathi to the Swami. The Swami made a gesture that he would leave the body at 12 'o clock the next day. The Swami blessed the two disciples who were crying inconsolably, took the last arati offered to him and left the body at 12 'o clock on during the day on 9-8-1902. He tilted towards Naidu and that was the end of the Swami's bodily existence. The sad news spread far and wide. Devotees thronged the place stricken with grief, and cremated the Swami at the place chosen by himself.

In the following decade a monument appeared on the Swami's samadhi.

A society of the devotees with Ratnasabhupati Pillai as the President was established and he remained in that position till 1913. Ever since regular social service is undertaken by the devotees. The grandson of Ratnanabhupathi, Professor V.A.Devasenapati not only wrote the life history of the Swami but remained President of the Sorakayala Swami Seva Samaj till 1984. After the passing away of Professor Devasenapathi, I am working as the President of the Samaj. Sri M. Ramchandran, is the chief Secretary. A Kalayana Mandapam, living rooms and dining halls were built and every year the aradhana celebrations of the Swami are done on a grand scale. Monthly festivals and other occasions are done with devotion and dedication. Even now the Swami continues to protect the devotees and come to their rescue in weal and woe.

Among those who had direct contact with the Swami and were initiated by him, mention may be made of Mootalamma, Maduguswami, Chatti Paradesi, Muntha Paradesi, Kumara Kuppam Swami, Mangamma and Nandanarswami. These are testimony to the power of the Sadguru to mould his disciples. In addition to these chief disciples, contemporary sages such as Kannukutti Swami, Madras Mohammadan Saint, Kasiswami, Sivaraja Yogi and Rajammal had the darshan of the Swami and felt inspired by his life and teachings.

There are many gurus who came to the rescue of their disciples. But Sorakalaswami is a unique yogi who shed tears for devotees, the poor and the despised.

Source:

Prof. B. Rama Raju and B. Rukmini. Sorakayalaswami Charitra, 1992.

14. PARASURAMAPANTULA LINGAMURTI GURUMURTI (1710-1800)

Parasuramapantula Lingamurti Gurumurti who not only brought renown to Andhradesa but also enriched Telugu language and literature is one born with a mission. He occupies a unique position among the illustrious sages of Andhra. He was a householder but achieved liberation following the path of Raja Yoga. He led countless seekers in the path of spiritual realization as *sadguru* and in addition wrote incomparable spiritual books adorning the Telugu language. Sanskrit has always been the treasure-house of spiritual books and very few such books exist in Telugu. Sages like Jnaneswar and Eknath wrote great Vedanta treatises in Marathi. There is, of course, Vedantic lore in the works of Tikkana, Madiki Singana/Jiawa *Vasishtha* Pothana in *Bhagavatha*. When compared with such literature in other languages, it is very slender. Lingamurti Gurumurti filled that vacuum by his original work in Telugu entitled *Seetharamanjaneya Samvada*. It offered Telugu readers Vedantic lore in a uniquely aesthetic and intelligible style of exposition and writing.

The older generation in Orugallu (the present Warangal) say that Lingamurti descended from Dandapanth, Shyamapanth, Parasurampanth and others who came from Maharashtra region and settled in the Oragallu mandala of Telangana. Relatives and disciples of Lingamurti are to be found in Eedulavaya, Senagavaram and Ambala villages. Lingamurti was born in Eedulavaya village. He got his education and led a family life in Ambala. He became an author and a great guru in Mattevada. Lingamurti who excels Pothana and Gopanna (Bhakta Ramadas) was a rare blend of devotion and detachment, Bhakti and Vairagya.

Mattevada is part of the great town Orugallu (present day Warangal). Lingamurti made it his native place. His lineage which continued for seven generations got extinct in the early part of the present century (20th). Radhakrishna Rao was a descendant of the 7th generation. I met

his sister Amritamma two or three times during 1973 - 74. In the very house Amritamma kept the pooja articles safely and securely, worshipping them regularly. The images that Lingamurti himself worshipped - such as Sri Ramapanchayatan, Marakathalinga, the crystal image of Vinayaka and Salagrama - I had the opportunity to see. Now the house is in a dilapidated condition. One Tumma Upendra lives in that house and is offering regular worship to the picture of Sri Ramachandra. The rest of the images are lost. Lingamurti's Samadhi used to be in the Venirao Garden on the Mattewada highway. Now both the Garden and the Samadhi are gone. Cement structures came all over. None can now tell the exact place. Even the 100 year old Sri Ramananda Yogi couldn't tell the exact place. Though one can console oneself that Lingamurti Gurumurti in the form of Anjaneya in that temple adjacent to Lingamurti's Samadhi, history will never forgive this unimaginable neglect of the citizens of Mattewada.

Lingamurti spoke only about his gurus, and his parents. His first guru was Kusuma Narayana, an adept in Tarakayoga. He belonged to the weaver's caste. The second guru was a Brahmin, Mahadeva guru by name. Lingamurti's father was Ramamantri, mother Thimmamba and wife Lingamamba. The family was blessed by the Goddess Saraswati, the Goddess of Learning.

Lingamurti's ancestors wrote many spiritual books. His own son Ramamurti wrote more than ten books such as *Adhyatma Ramayana*, *Sukacharitra* and *Seetharamanjaneya* in lyrical form. Lingamurti's descendants in the fourth generation included Ramakrishna Somayaji who, in addition to performing yajnas also propagated the Ramamantra.

Lingamurti's own writings are (1) *Ratimanmatha Vilasa*, (2) *Jivanmukti Prakarana*, (3) *Naradaparameshthi Samvada*, (4) *Sankhyayoga*, (5) *Tarakayoga*, (6) *Manasasataka*, (7) *Song of Sita*, (8) *Atmaramasataka*, (9) *Govindasataka*, (10) *Pancharatna* and (11) *Seetharamanjaneya Samvada*. Among these, only the first he wrote for literary renown. The rest he wrote as part of his

spiritual quest. I had the good fortune of introducing books numbered 8,9,10 above, for the first time.

Seetharamanjaneya Samvada is a crest jewel among spiritual books in Telugu on Vedantic Philosophy. This is an extension of *Adhyatma Ramayana* which is in the form of a dialogue between Uma and Maheswara. It is a part of the *Brahmandapurana*. The extension was based on celebrated classical Advaitic texts such as *Upanishads*, *Bhagavad Gita*, *Panchadasi*, *Aparokshanubhuti Gurugita*, *Yoga Darshana* and *Yogavasishtha*. It is composed in three parts, namely "Taraka", "Sankhya" and "Amanaska" Yoga traditions. It is a Prabandha with "Santarasa" as its dominant emotion. It is a book that spells out in a masterly way, and reflecting the Raja Yoga tradition, all the facets of sadhana necessary for a spiritual seeker; and it is unique as it emerges from the author's authentic experience of these matters. In the evocation of Santharasa (the emotion of peace), Lingamurti Gurumurti is comparable to Bammera Pothana whose Telugu rendering of Bhagavatam is a household name in Andhradesa. Both blessed Orugallu by being residents there.

We do not have authentic details about Lingamurti's birth, etc. We can speculate that he was born in the first decade of the 18th century and lived until the end of the century. The details of his life and times are explored in detail by Seshadri Ramana Kavulu, and Dr. Ratnakara Balaraju did an indepth and invaluable study of Gurumurti's magnum opus, *Seetharamanjaneya Samvada*. Similarly the philosophy of this book was ably expounded by Medapati Venkata Reddy. There are many legends current about Lingamurti Gurumurti's life. There is the story that when he was, in his boyhood, roaming in the precincts of a village called Eedulavaya near Mattevada, a sage by name Mahadevayogi initiated him into the "Ramamantra". Then Lingamurti performed intense tapas in those areas and achieved "mantrasiddhi" - perfection in achieving the goal of the mantra. He then installed the Shatchakra Seetha Rama images given by his guru in his house and ever since worship of the images has been going on uninterruptedly. This is the story current now. There is another story. According to this, Lingamurti lived in his boyhood in Ambala

and learnt Sanskrit and Telugu quite well. In his youth, it is said, he wrote an erotic poem called *Ratimanmatha Vilasa*. After that, as a result of merit that accrued to him from his past life, he gained the company of a weaver devotee called Kusuma Narayana. This satsanga made him know the "Sri Rama Tarakamantra". Moreover, his study of spiritual texts he developed great detachment - vairagya. Kusuma Narayana did not, himself, initiate Lingamurti Gurumurti but sent him to his own guru Mahadeva who lived in Manthena. Lingamurti got initiated into Sri Ramamantra and succeeded in realisation of the efficacy of that mantra. Some scholars hold that Mahadeva was not Kusuma Narayana's guru but his guru's son.

Whatever the matter, Kusuma Narayana was Lingamurti's first guru and Mahadeva his second. Whereas the one taught him Yoga, the other taught him mantra. The first guru was a Sudra, the second a Brahmin. The caste rigidities are only for the common people and not for an enlightened sage like Lingamurti. The older generations of people living in Eedulavaya tell wonderful, miraculous stories about KusumaNarayana. He was a great Raja Yogi, a siddha purusha and a blessed one who used his miraculous powers for the welfare of humanity. Lingamurti respected both his gurus equally. In his magnum opus, *Seetharamanjaneya Samvada* he extolled profusely both his gurus. In the 7th verse in the beginning of the text, he extolled Kusuma Narayana guru and in the 8th verse Mahadeva guru. Lingamurti did intense tapas in the hills of Ramagiri and realised the experience of Brahmavidya taught by his two gurus. It is said that while doing tapas in the Ramagiri hills, Lord Sri Ramachandra gave him his darshan in the form of a Brahmin. He gave him a golden image of Rama, a crystal image of Vinayaka and another Linga made of one of the nine gems, a Shatchakrasalagrama and the images of Sita Rama. He told him: "You worship all these without moving them here and there or taking them to another place. Keep them in your house only. They will confer inestimable blessings on seven generations of your family." So saying Sri Ramachandra blessed him and vanished. I saw all these precious objects in 1973. But they are no longer to be seen.

Lingamurti moved later from Ramagiri to Mattevada and settled there. He built a house there which should be protected by the Telugus as a monument of national pride.

Lingamurti cited in the succession of his gurus, Dattatreya Janardanaswami, Ekoguru, Narahari Mahesa Guru, Nagoji Rama Guru, Koneru Guru, and Mahadeva Guru. Among these, Dattatreya is a guru who figures in the Puranas. The rest are all historical figures. The first four are Maharashtrains, and the last two are Telugus. From this guru heritage we can infer that Lingamurti belongs to the Dattatreya tradition. Dattatreya is the guru of gurus. Today many devotees worship Sai Baba as the incarnation of Dattatreya. Janardanaswami was born in the Chalisgaon in Maharashtra and grew up in Daulatabad. He was a householder and a Rajayogi. Ekanathaswami (1533-1599) was his disciple. Ekanath was born in Paithan and leading the life of a householder, yet wrote *Bhagavatha*, *Bhavartha Ramayana*, *Rukmini Parinaya*, *Abhangavali* etc. He was a great Rajayogi. Mahadevaguru, descendant of the fifth generation of Ekanatha, was a resident of Manthena. If we calculate 30 years for each generation he must belong to the period of 150 years later. Ekanatha wrote *Bhagavatha* around 1755 A.D. Therefore, the period of Mahadeva must be $1573 + 150 = 1722$. Lingamurti, disciple of Mahadeva must have been born around 1710 and wrote, presumably, *Seetharamanjaneya Samvada* around 1755. We learn from authoritative sources that he lived until the end of the 18th century and took sanyas. Hence he was not cremated.

Sources:

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15. LINGAMDINNE DHARANI SITARAMA YOGI NDRASWAMI (1714 - 1796)

All traditions agree that Dattatreya is the guru of gurus. In the Trethayuga he manifested himself in sixteen incarnations. In the Kaliyuga numerous are the incarnations of Dattatreya. Historically, the full incarnations of Dattatreya are Sripada Srivallbha and Sri Narasimha Saraswati. Both of them have association with Andhra. Sripada Srivallabha was born in Pithapuram in the East Godavari district. And Sri Narasimha Saraswati brought his physical incarnation to end in Sri Sailam in Karnool district. Afterwards just as many incarnations of Dattatreya appeared in other areas, so too he appeared in many incarnate forms in Andhra. Among them Dharani Sitarama Yogindra is one. It is said that in the 17th century, King Nanda brought from Kashi 500 Chaudeswari devotee Brahmins belonging to 13 gothras and gave them Nandavara for settling down. These Brahmins with 13 gothras who came from Kashi are called "Nandavarikas". Among them the founder of Vasishta Gothra was known as Tarkasastra Madhavabhattu.

Among his descendants were Subbayya and Thimmamba. Their surname was Dharani and they settled down in 17th century in Korrapadu, in Kadapa' district and Proddaturu Taluk. Their family deity was Chaudeshwari. They also worshipped Kambagiri Narasimhaswami. Their first born was Ramayamantri and the second was Seshayamatya. They were known by the colloquial names of Elder Kambagiri and Younger Kambagiri. On the auspicious date of 4-1-1714, a third son was born. When the third was born fragrant smells pervaded the air, and shafts of light illuminated the corners and the entire village was filled with joy. The child was named Sitaramaswami.

The handsome child had extraordinary radiance on his face and his beauty filled the spectators with indescribable joy. His father died when he was only three or four years old. Timmamba was put to immense hardship

and brought up her three sons with great difficulty. When he attained six years of age, the behavior of Sitarama appeared strange: he used to count his fingers, tear small twigs from plants, or remain abstracted. These strange acts made some to regard Sitarama as eccentric. Moreover, since he behaved in an unruly and mischievous way some used to call him "the naughty Sitarama." To eke out a living, his mother sent him to look after the cattle of some villagers. Like Gopala Krishna, Pothuluri Veerabrahmam and Poodota Lingavadhuta, Sitarama Swami also looked after cattle. One day he sent the cattle, as usual, for grazing and he was playing near a temple in the vicinity. Then a yogi, adorned with rudraksha beads and danakamandalu, came there and perceiving the divine radiance on the boy's face, wrote some mystic letters on his tongue and thus initiated him with a mantra. From that moment, Sitarama became a worshipper of Dattatreya. Many siddhis came to him.

Since Sitarama became much more markedly eccentric after he started worshipping Dattatreya this caused untold anxiety to his mother Thimmamba. In such circumstances, some old friends of Sitarama's father Subbayya visited them to express their grief over their friend's death. They hailed from Boorugucherla and were accomplished Vedic pandits. Thimmamba told them about their pitiable condition and pleaded with them to give proper education to her son Sitarama. They gladly accepted to do so and took the son to Boorugucherla on an auspicious day. They started Sitarama's education. He, however, evinced very little, almost no interest - in studies and always remained in a state of intense meditation with his closed eyes. The gurus tried their best to teach him but woefully failed. They used to call him "the wooden Sitaramaswami." in utter disgust.

One day the gurus went with their students to gather some leaves in the forest. To collect leaves, the sishyas went in different directions. Sitaramaswami wandered out in his own manner. The disciples returned but even after the lapse of considerable time, Sitarama didn't return. They wondered what happened to the "wooden Sitarama" and went in different directions looking for him. They at last found him near the foot of a hillock and that too in an asana called sirshasana. "the head down

posture". Amazed they called out to him in loud voices. Sitarama disregarded their shoutings and, instead, went on expanding the size of his body to that of the hillock. Seeing the spectacle they all were struck with fear and wonder. They recognized him as a supreme yogi. Sitarama revealed his real nature to all.

They then treated him respectfully and took him back to their hermitage. After two or three days they took him back to Korrapadu and handed him over to his mother. They told her that his birth was a divinely designed one, that without any instruction from anyone he was already learned. They also prophesied that in the years to come he will be adored and worshipped as a great Mahatma by all people. Therefore they advised the mother not to do anything against his wishes. Afterwards, they took leave and went back to Boorugularacherla.

After some time, Sitarama told his mother that his brothers would get married and continue the genealogy of the family. But he himself would like to remain a brahmachari-bachelor. He got her permission and chose Srisai lam and Ahobalam as congenial places for his tapas. He did tapas in areas infested with wild animals and deadly snakes and after intense austerities and tapas he achieved God-realisation. All the eight powers- ashtasiddhis-became his handmaids. He then travelled all over the country and propagated dharma. Removing all calamities in villages, restoring the sick to health, coming to the rescue of people who were placed in critical situations, giving warning about impending perils to those who surrendered to him, fulfilling the needs of devotees-such things became Sitarama's daily activities. Those who heard about him and saw his extraordinary spiritual powers cordially invited him to their homes and worshipped him. After some time, at the request of devotees Sitaramaswami settled in Lingamdinne near Allagadda in Kamool district. He chose this place for his tapas. For the stay of the devotees, for worship and for his own tapas, he got an ashrama, a Siva temple and a tank built. From that time onwards, devotees came to Lingamdinne for his darshan. Common people called him Father Sita and the scholars regarded him as an incarnation of Dattatreya and called him Sri Dharani Sitaramayogindra Swami.

In their writings, contemporary pandits and poets described in their works that the Swami performed what is called the "Seven offspring" installation. These seven are son, treasure, tank, poem, temple, garden, and agrahara (exclusive residential area for Brahmins). Since the Swami does not have children being a Sanyasi - all his devotees were his children. They received his blessings and benedictions. There are reliable sources of information which show that the Swami performed many charitable activities at various places. In Lingamdinne, a Siva temple, a tank and a garden, in Reddivari Korrapadu of Proddutur taluk, a Nandiswara temple in Bhimunipadu in Koyilakuntla taluk a farm, and a well, the same things in Muttalur in Allagadda Taluk, in Yammanur a temple for Choudambika, and Amba, in Varunaphalapura, a Dattatreya Math and garden in Nandavaram renovation of Chaudeswari temple; these are some of the works Sitarama Swami did. Undertaking such activities by monks was unknown in those days. The good works that the Swami did are described by Swami's disciple Ramakrishnakavi in his *Chamundika Vilasa*. Similar mention is made by Chauduru Seshambhattu in his *Churnika*. (A sort of harmonious prose, not divided into prosodial feet).

From an edict dated 15-8-1785, we learn that Sitaramaswami reclaimed a temple for Divine Mother where daily worship and other rituals were stopped for four years and reactivated them. Wherever the Swami was, he made it a point to visit the temple at the time of worship by astral travel, Kama gamana as it is called. The edict tells us further that the prasada of the Divine Mother was served to all without distinction of caste, creed and colour. Similarly, the Vedic pandits received honors befitting their stature, regularly.

Sitaramaswami had disciples from all castes and clans. Among them some were yogis, some poets, and some were pandits. Many of his disciples received samadhi while alive and receive regular worship to this day. Many of the Swami's disciples whose families worship him as their family deity are gifted poets and wrote eulogizing the Swami and his great powers. Among these disciple scholar poets, mention may be

made of Krishtipati Venkatasubba Kavi, Sakunala Subbayya, Rangayamatyuni Rama Krishna Kavi. Chauduri Seshambhattu, and Vajjhala Subba Kavi.

Sitaramswami was also responsible for the tradition of composing lyrical satakas in praise of Dattatreya. We have in one such abundant and vivid descriptions of the Swami's miraculous powers, his yogic attainments, etc. Krishtipati Venkata Subba Kavi was initially a gifted litterateur but with the blessings and grace of the Swami became an adept in mantra and tantra vidya and performed many miracles by himself. In this way many devotees - poets wrote extensively about the pastimes - leelas - of their guru Sitaramaswami. Many of them remain unpublished.

Thus Sri Dharani Sitarama Swami was a source of strength and support not only to those who surrendered to him but also to the poor and the downtrodden. To this day his grace continues to be showered on his disciples. Among the miracles he performed, mention may be made of the following:

(1) In the middle of two villages Korrapadu and Gajeguduru, Kollu Narasimhayya, a Kamma by caste, had some land. He cultivated peanuts and after harvest arranged the crop in heaps. He asked Sitaramaswami who was 9 years old at that time to look after the heaps of crop. At that time, torrential rain set in and the entire region was inundated with rainwater. But the area where there were heaps of peanuts remained dry without a drop of water. Narasimhayya who saw this extraordinary miracle fell at the feet of Sitaramaswami and craved forgiveness. He prayed to the Swami to continue to look after his family and bestow his blessings. The Swami assured him of his continuing protection. With the blessings of the Swami, descendants of Kollu family such as Narasimhayya, Peddaramayya and Chinna Ramayya continued to enjoy worldly prosperity and spiritual welfare. The Swami told them not to take payasam (Farina pudding) made with rice grain. To this day, the descendants do not take payasam.

(2) Ramasubhayya, a Brahmin living in Gajeguduru had no children. There was hardly a God he did not pray to or a pilgrim center he did not visit. When he was forlorn with depression someone told him about Sitaramayogindra. He went to the Swami and prayed to him, seeking his blessings for a child. The Swami blessed him and Ramasubbayya had two children. On the command of the Swami, he named them, respectively as Dattayya and Ramayya. One day the Swami went to Ramasubbaya's house and asked for castor oil, since he wanted to take an oil bath. Ramasubbaya's wife brought a pot full of castor oil and gave it to him.

The Swami massaged his body with the total quantum of the oil and gave the empty pot back to the lady. The lady thought that the Swami did not leave even a drop for their children and emptied the whole pot. Omniscient as the Swami was, he understood what Ramasubbayya's wife was thinking. He immediately squeezed out the entire oil from his body into the pot and gave it—full to the brim with oil she gave - to the lady. His body was the same as it was before—without a drop of oil clinging to it. The wife of Ramasubbayya felt ashamed at her greed and repented.

(3) Once a scholar's meet was held in Rudravaram. Krishtipati Subbakavi also attended it and it so happened that Sitaramayogindra was also there. But he was in a distracted mood. Everyone in that gathering saluted the Subbakavi. But since the Swami didn't do that, Subbakavi abused him severely. Then Sitaramayogindraswami told him: "Sir! Since I went to save your child who was about to fall from the top of your house,

I came here only this instant!" At once Subbakavi went to his place on a horse to test whether this was true. His wife told him that when their son was about to fall from the top of their house, a sadhu came, caught the child in his lap and protecting him thus went his way. Venkatasubbakavi rushed back to Rudravaram and beseeching the Swami for forgiveness, sought to give some money to him obviously in gratitude. But the Swami refused to touch the money. Subbakavi was overwhelmed by the Swami's detachment and falling at his feet, prayed to the Swami to accept him as his disciple. The swami accepted his plea and initiating him, moulded him into one of his foremost disciples. Details regarding his sadhana and his

later emergence as a great master are to be found in the hundred verses of his book *Dattaprabhu Satakam*.

(4) Once Sitaramayogindra went to Nandavaram to offer worship to Goddess Chaudeshwari. Seeing his bizarre appearance, the kids and the young fellows there thought that he was a mad fellow. They started mocking and ridiculing him. Resenting this, the Swami went out and sat on the outskirts of the village. Suddenly all the wells in the village dried up. The villagers were put to great hardship. They enquired and realised that this was the result of the young fellows ridiculing the great Master. Then the village elders went out in a ceremonial procession and brought him back to the village with all traditional honors accorded to a sage. And the wells were filled fully with water as before.

(5) In Uppunillagovindinne village there were some extremely beautiful damsels who were adept in dance, and singing. On the instigation of some villagers, they invited the Swami respectfully to their village and arranged for his stay in the house of a villager. The Swami took his bath near a well with his generative organ openly seen. From a distance, some of these villagers and the ladies saw this scene. The Swami remained unperturbed and silent. As the night came, one of these expert ladies was sent to massage the Swami's holy feet. The ladies' hands, on the pretext of massaging, moved slowly from the feet to the Swami's torso and she touched him in an attempt to locate his penis. To her utter horror, she found in that place a woman's generative organ. She slapped her cheeks in grief and repentance and falling at his feet craved the Swami's forgiveness. The rest followed imploring him to forgive them. An ocean of compassion, the Swami pardoned and blessed them. Ever since that day they come to Lingamdinne on the occasion of Dattajayanti and show their extraordinary artistic skill by performing various items of dancing and singing. Hereditarily, they name their children after the Swami.

(6) Once the Swami went to Tangutur. There were quite a number of people there possessed by devils and demons. The villagers implored the Swami to save them and their children. The Swami asked a big clay

pot to be brought and got it filled with water. He charged the water with magical incantations. He then administered the water as sacred holy, tirtha. Instantly, the curse lifted.

In this way the Swami served the villagers in various ways. When digging a well no water was struck; they sought his help and plenty of water welled up. When there was drought and the prospect of harvest was nil, the Swami made rain to fall at the proper time. Similarly, barren women got children, people with mental disturbance regained peace of mind, poor people became rich with the blessings of the Swami. People of all castes without any discrimination took refuge at the feet of the Swami and got their desires fulfilled.

There appeared on the Swami's body - at the back - a big carbuncle. Since he was above all dualities, he used to bear the pain without flinching. But in a strange manner, he used to pluck it out at the time of performing sandhya and pooja and after finishing them took it and put it back at the same place as before. The disciples who saw this miracle asked him why he doesn't remove it once and for all, since he was capable of doing such a thing. The Swami replied, "Though we are capable of stopping whatever befalls us in this birth, it is better to go through it in this birth itself. Otherwise we will have to take another birth."

The Swami who knew the past, present and future, arranged for his samadhi a place near the Siva temple he built himself, in Lingamdinne. On Wednesday the 14th of December, 1796, (Margasira Pournami of the year Nala), the Datta Jayanti Day, he did pooja to him and as per Datta's command, entered samadhi on Saturday 17.12.1796 (Margasira Bahula Tadiya). It is described in the Sitaramaswami Mangalashtaka written by Shaddarsanam Somasundara Sarma that he will be, with full live consciousness, in sajiva samadhi for 700 years and that he will continue to protect devotees. Even to this day, devotees who have done intense tapas with full faith and devotion have darshan of the Swami. It is said that Ganapati Satchidanada Swami of Mysore, considered to be the

Incarnate Form of Dattatreya had the direct darshan of Sitaramayogindra.

After the Swami entered Mahasamadhi, the very next day ceremonies and celebrations began at the place. To those who doubted whether the Swami was really alive, and the samadhi stone was lifted to check, the Swami, it is said, raised his hand (in benediction) and flung his cane up. Since the children of the Swami's elder brother (Venkatagiri) Ramayya settled at Kotakonda village of Pattikonda taluk, the descendants of his younger brother (Chinakambagiri) Seshayya, perform the celebration of the Swami with the help and cooperation of the devotees. At present, Dharani Rama Subbarao, a descendant of Seshayya is the trustee. Several forms of pooja are done such as Dattatreya vrata, Datta homa, Poomahuthi, Paduka pooja, etc. On the third day the revered Swami's padukas and cane are brought with auspicious music from the house of the head of the peetham to the Swami's temple. Then arathi is given followed by distribution of prasada to the assembled devotees. During the night, Harikatha performances narrating the Swami's life and message are given. To this day the devotees feel the presence of the Swami and are convinced that he fulfills their desires.

Source:

1. *Vaidyam Venkatesyvaracharya-Sri Gurudeva Datta Dharani Sitaramayogindra Swami Vari Mahatmyamu-Karnool 1989.*

16. TARIGONDA VENKAMMA

(1730-1817)

There are instances all over the world that differences of caste or creed or gender biases as men and women do not matter for devotion and spiritual experiences. Right from the Vedic age there were Brahnavadins, women who realised the Brahman, in our country. Among them Tarigonda Venkamma is foremost. In the history of Telugu literature hers is a significant place. Since she was not only a gifted poet, but also the author of two very important books on yogic knowledge, she must be considered a supreme Telugu Yogini. Since she was born in a place called Tarigonda, she was called Tarigonda Venkamma. Tarigonda is situated four miles away from Vayalpadu Taluk in Chittor district. It is a Lakshmi Narasimha Kshetra. Some of her ancestors belonging to Vasishtha Gothara of Nandavarika came from Kanala in Kumool district and settled in Tarigonda long ago. Among them Kanala Krishnayya was one. His wife was Mangamma. Both were devotees of Lakshmi Narasimhaswami and led a virtuous life. Since they had no children for a long time, they went and had darshan of Lord Venkateswara at Tirumala and prayed to him. With the blessings of the Lord they had a girl child and named her after the Lord, as Venkamma. Since she was born after a long time, the parents brought her up with great affection as a rare child. Her childhood was filled with the tenderness and love of her parents. When the parents offered pooja to their deities Lakshmi Narasimha and Venkateswara Swami, the child Venkamma also partook in the pooja. It was a wonderful spectacle for the parents as well as those who witnessed it. Born in a family gifted with an intense atmosphere of literature and the fervour of devotion, both the gifts came to Venkamma.

Even as she grew, her devotion, too, grew in Venkamma. This was embarrassing to the parents. Without playing with children of her age, Venkamma was, lost in singing devotional songs and dancing. Krishnayya felt increasing anxiety. To distract her mind they used to dump on her a large quantum of domestic works. But Venkamma did everything quickly

and never allowed her intense devotion to slacken. When the parents thought that marriage would make Venkamma divert her attention to family matters, she declared firmly to her father that she didn't need a secular marriage and that God Himself was her husband. Her father disregarded her plea and married her off to Venkatachalapathi, son of .Injeti Timmayya who was a resident of Naragunta Palem near Chittoor .Venkamma took her father to task but continued her devotional writings ,When she came of age, they arranged her nuptials. In the nuptial room Venkamma told Venkatachalapathi that since she was already married to Lord Venkateswara he should not compel her to have conjugal relations with him. She told this with so much firmness and conviction that Venkatachalapathi was amazed and went back to his village. There is also a story that he had darshan of mother Chaudeswari Devi and terrified by that he fled to his village. He grieved immensely that he didn't have conjugal relations and marital fulfillment with such a beautiful bride and the intolerable sorrow killed him. The death of her husband made .Venkamma much more intense in her devotion to Venkateswara Swami The spirit of dispassion and discrimination was strengthened in her. Much advanced in her awareness of things, she refused to remove the insignia of a wife whose husband is alive. Her father and the other Brahmins insisted that she should abide by the rules of the community. When her ,parents were cowed down by the conventions of an orthodox society Venkamma enlightened them with her observation that such conventions are man-made and not mandates from God. Her father Krishnayya realised that it is desirable to follow his daughter's advice. He took Venkamma to Roopavatharam Subrahmanya Sastri and requested him to .initiate his daughter into the spiritual path. Sastri gladly agreed

Saastri taught Vedanta to Venkamma in the presence of his chosen deity Someswara Swami. Venkamma worshipped Sastri as the embodiment of the trinity of Gods (Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara). The guru appreciated the spirit of conviction and devotion, knowledge and detachment which he saw in Venkamma. He then gave her mantropadesha, initiated her with a sacred mantra and explained to her

the subtleties of Bhakti, Jnana and Yoga. Her innate wisdom fructified with her intense sadhana. Pleased with the progress Venkamma made, he explained to her a few more paths of sadhana and their subtleties and blessing her sent her back to Tarigonda. After returning to her parental home, Venkamma spent most of her time in the Lakshmi Narasimha Swami temple. In the secluded place behind the image of Anjaneyaswami, Venkamma engaged herself in tapas and was always in a state of yoga samadhi, a deep contemplative absorption. But none knew about this. In the time left she undertook writing poems of a deeply devotional nature. Her first composition in the field of Bhakti literature was *Narisimha Sataka*. Her second work was *Nrisimhivilasa* based on the story of Prahlada. This was in the form of Yakshagana. Both were dedicated to Narasimhaswami of Tarigonda. Her third work called *Sivavilasa* (this also in a Yakshagana form) was dedicated to Veerabhadraswami, the presiding deity of Rachaviti (now Rayachoti). When the extremely beautiful, young and widowed Venkamma used to visit the temple of Narasimhaswami, some vicious fellows mocked her. Some indulged in scandalous stories. Venkamma surrendered all her responsibility to Lord Narisimha and went on with her writing, Yogasadhana and intense tapas. Her poetic talent and creativity gradually became more and more mature. It was during this period that she wrote the philosophical poem *Rajayogamritasara* dedicated to Narasimhaswami and also a play in the form of Yakshagana called *Balakrishna Yakshagana* dedicated to Vasudevaparabrahma.

The Brahmins of Tarigonda disliked Venkamma's attitude of renunciation. When they began to spread all kinds of rumours about her conduct, she remained unperturbed and indifferent. Their teasing and malicious propaganda she ignored. This enraged some of the Brahmins and they declared that unless Venkamma tonsured her head as befits a brahmin widow, she and her family would be excommunicated from the a Brahmin community. Though Krishnayya had great love and respect for his daughter, he was mortally afraid of his community and arranged for the ceremony of tonsuring Venkamma's hair as the Brahmins

demanded. Venkamma sat in intense meditation on her Lord Narasimhaswami and surrendering her self to His care, and bent her head for the barber to remove the hair. The barber became limp with intense fear and his hand refused to move. He was filled with dread as a deer which sees a tiger. The same thing happened to the group of Brahmins who came to witness the fun. The ceremony of removing the hair was abandoned. But the ritualridden, orthodox Brahmins communicated this to the head of the Pushpagiri Peetham.

Sri Vidyansimha Bharati Swami was the pontiff of the Peetha at that time. First he sent a letter and shortly after he came, himself. He stayed in the temple and sent a message to Venkamma to present herself before him. Venkamma said that she would do that after finishing her meal. The reply surprised the pontiff and made the Brahmin community extremely angry. Venkamma arrived and since a widow with hair cannot, conventionally, be seen, the pontiff arranged for a curtain. The Swami advised Venkamma about the duties of a chaste wife and a brahmin widow and ordered that as a woman who lost her husband she must remove her hair. From behind the curtains itself Venkamma advanced her counter arguments. She declared that since a chaste wife cannot touch a man other than her husband, how could she touch a barber? In what scripture, she asked, was the virtue of a wife linked to either having or not having her hair. She asked boldly whether the pontiff could assure that no hair could grow after she got her existing hair cut. Her reasonable arguments and her refusal to do prostrations to him angered the pontiff and also filled him with wonder. When she was asked why she didn't do namaskars to the Jagadguru, she said if the pontiff moved aside from the seat, she would do the namaskar. The pontiff realised that there was some deep meaning in her statement and he got the curtain removed and got out of the chair he was occupying. Venkamma then, offered prayers to Lakshmi Narasimha Swami, meditated on him for a few minutes and bringing her two hands together did namaskar to the empty seat. Instantly the chair caught fire and was reduced to ashes. The Jagadguru was petrified with fear and declaring that Venkamma was an incarnation of

Prahlada did namaskar to her himself and praising her left the group of Brahmins. The Brahmin community was put to shame. Still the Brahmins refused to visit Krishnayya's house uniformly. The helpless Krishnayya feeling that he was humiliated beyond repair by the 'misdeeds' of his own daughter, wept with sorrow and with exasperation asked Venkama to leave the house forthwith.

Imbued with a strong sense of renunciation, Venkamma considered this as a divine command and leaving the house, reached the Nrisimha temple and did severe sadhana, spending her day and night in intense meditation and singing the glories of the Lord. In the ecstasy of her devotion she often entered the sanctum sanctorum and worshipped the Lord to her heart's content. When the priests closed the temple doors at night, she used to continue her bhajans in the mantap. When she sang kirtan in the early morning hours, the entire temple premises was surcharged with the waves of her intense devotion. Like Mira in the North, Venkamma is a great devotee whose advent blessed the Andhra region. No one knew that she remained in a state of intense samadhi, without food, for weeks together, sitting behind the image to Anjaneyaswami. Since she was not seen, they all thought that she had left the village. One day, the priest saw Venkamma in the darkness behind the Anjaneyaswami image and though initially unable to identify he later recognised her. Thinking that she was there for some illicit purpose, he dragged her out clutching her hair. Disturbed in her samadhi she looked intently at him, opening her eyes. Unable to bear her look, he fainted. Recovering after some time, he fell at her feet asking her to forgive him for the heinous sin he had committed. Venkamma felt that it was God's wish that she should leave Tarigonda. She started, alone, and disregarding hunger and thirst went through thick forests and jungles and finally entered the forest of Venkatachala which led her in the direction of Tirupati. As she travelled through thick forests and jungles, singing kirtans in praise of Lakshmi Narasimha Swami, even wild and cruel animals did not harm even serpents ceased to bother her. Travelling for two days through these jungles, Venkamma entered Mogalipentakona. She did intense tapas

there in the presence of Lord Venkateswara seated in a postural position : overlooking Anjaneyaswami. One day she had an experience. Venkateswaraswami appeared before her and asked her to come. Praying to Anjaneyaswami for protecting her from the dangers of those deep, thick forests, she left the forests behind, climbed the mountains that dotted her way and finally reached Tirumala. Her tapas bore fruit. Surcharged with intense devotion which overpowered her entire being, she praised Lord Venkateswara and finally entered His presence in the temple and had His darshan to her heart's content. She was filled with ecstasy. Perhaps, she was already well-known in Tirumala for her unique devotion to the Lord and also as a great yogini. The Mahant of the temple arranged for her to stay in a thatched house situated towards the east of the Lord's temple. He also arranged for her receiving, in the name of Vakula Malika, rice and other items for her food. Venkamma used to prepare her own food, offer it as naivedya to the Lord and after eating, used to carry on her writing. During leisure hours, she developed a garden and with the flowers that blossomed she used to prepare garlands and send them for decorating the Lord. After reaching Tirumala, she was initiated into the Hayagriva mantra: We see the presence of hymns she composed in Tirumala the praise of Hayagriva which were not to be found in her earlier compositions. The first work she composed in Tirumala was an Yakshagana called *Vishnu Parijata*. It is full of the fragrance of intense devotion.

Hearing about Venkamma's unique faith and devotion, the descendants of Sankirtanacharya Tallapaka Peda Tirumalachaiya, based in Tirumala, offered her a pacca house belonging to them, situated on the east Mada Street. Venkamma thus moved from a hut to a pacca terraced house. She grew flower plants and Basil plant garden. She prepared with them garlands for the Lord. Staying in that house, she wrote a dwipadakavya by name *Ramaparinaya* which was composed in the form of a marriage song. Adjacent to Venkamma's house there stayed one Akka Ramayya Deekshitulu. He was an official priest appointed by the East India Company and was a very influential person. He didn't like Venkamma, the young

widow who defied all traditions and conventions, preparing garlands for the Lord. He resented her staying as a next door neighbour. He used to tease her with vitriolic words and make the defiled leaf plates used in his house for taking food thrown into Venkamma's flower garden. He used to trouble her and feel delighted. One day Venkamma was sitting in intense meditation on the pyal of the Tulsi plant when the defiled leaf plates landed on her. Her intense dhyana was interrupted. Overcome with anger at this, Venkamma who never knew anger at any time, cursed the family of Deekshulu to perish. That very night some people belonging to his family were stricken with diarrhea and vomiting and died. Deekshulu fell at the feet of Venkamma, imploring her to forgive him. She revoked the curse partially saying that since then only one member will be alive in the family.

This incident, divinely ordained, disturbed Venkamma's mind. She resolved to do her tapas, thence forth, in a solitary place. Unknown to anyone, she went off to Tumburukona and intense tapas engulfed her. Tumburukona is a lovely place, solitary and secluded, situated about 10-12 miles to the west of Tirumala Temple. Only those who observe Brahmacharya, do Pranayama, and tapas can stay in that place. For others, it is inaccessible. After two hundred years, Sadguru Malayalaswami (1897-1962) alone could do tapas here. The residents of Tirumala thought that Venkamma died or disappeared in one of the many jungles around. Venkamma performed very hard and intense tapas in Tumburukona and during leisure hours wrote a folk drama-Chanchunataka. After some time, a Brahmin named Chandrasekhara, stricken by leprosy travelled to Tirumala but ignored by everyone, took to the jungles and reached Tumburukona. Hearing his piteous cry Venkamma gave him some water and wild fruits and gave him blessings. She warned him not to tell anyone about her being there and if he did, dire calamity would surely overtake him. Then she asked him to close his eyes and when he opened them he found that dreadful disease had disappeared and he was in the sacred tank in Tirumala. For sometime, he kept Venkamma's whereabouts a secret but in a moment of exultation over recovering his health, he revealed it. Instantly his skull cracked and he

died. Uptil now his “Brindavanam’ is still there to the west of the Swami’s Pushkarini. (Tank). Hearing the news of Venkamma’s stay, the Mahant of Tirumala temple went, with traditional auspicious music, to Tumburukona and pleading with her brought her back to Tirumala. Venkamma started staying in her former house (given by the Tallapaka family) and continued her ardent worship of Venkateswara Swami.

Gradually, Venkamma secured land adjacent to her house and developed a Tulasi Brindavana garden. She got a well dug to water the plants. But though they dug quite deep, they didn’t strike any water. Then Venkamma went down into the well and there composed a poem imploring Mother Ganga to grace them with water. Eventually abundant water appeared. Mangamma, daughter of Venkamma’s sister came there to serve her aunt. After some time Venkamma arranged for Mangamma’s marriage into the Cheenepalli family based in Garidimitta. In her advanced age, she adopted Narasappa belonging to that family. (His wife was Chengamma and they had a daughter Lakshamamma; Lakshamma’s husband Gangadharappa took down Venkamma’s composition Vishnu Parijata). After the evening rituals Venkamma used to give camphor arati during the Ekanta seva. Orthodox priests used to resent this and mocked her. One day when they abused her audibly, she gave up the arathi ritual in the temple. She was satisfied immensely by giving arathi in her own home. The next day was the car festival. The chariot went through the customary route and when it came before Venkamma’s house, it stalled and stopped moving. However much they tried, it didn’t move an inch. Everyone right from the chief priest tried desperately but in vain. Then the eyes of the priests opened. Then everyone including the Mahant approached Venkamma and imploring her forgiveness, asked her to give arati as she did earlier. Then they said the deity’s car will move. Venkamma acceded to their request and gave the camphor arathi to Venkateswara along with his consort. The chariot moved instantly. The inhabitants of Tirumala hailed Venkamma and praised her to the skies. Ever since that day, Venkamma’s arathi was accepted as the daily arathi. Even to this day arathi is given by the name of “Tarigonda arathi”

or 'muthyala arathi,' This practice continues uninterruptedly.

From the day Venkamma reached Tirumala. She worshipped Venkateswara and Lakshmi Narasimhaswami as one undifferentiated divine being. She used to celebrate Lakshmi Narasimha Swami festival every year. She brought the pooja articles from her father's place in Tarigonda. For ten days, beginning from Vaisakha Shuddha Chavithi, she performed the celebrations of Lakshmi Narasimhaswami with annandana (offering of sanctified food to the poor) and other religious activities. On the tenth day, the Utsava Murti (the replica of the Deity meant for being taken out on important occasions) used to come to Venkamma's house and accept all the traditional honors and poojas.

Spiritual aspirants sages, saints, lovers of literature and pilgrims invariably went to have Venkamma's darshan. Gradually, landlords, rich people and even feudal lords came and offered huge donations unasked, spontaneously for the continuation of there activities. By the time she started writing the *Bhagavata* in dwipada metre, there were eight pandit scribes to prepare copies of her writings. They used to prepare multiple copies of her writings. Pandits and poets who visited Tirumala came for her darshan and took away copies specially commissioned for them. Among these, *Nrisimha' Vilasa*, *Vishnuparijata* and *Gopinataka* were much sought after writings of Venkamma and number of copies got prepared by scribes to meet the need. After *Dwipada Bhagavatha* she wrote *Venkatachala Mahatyam* in Champu (a mixture of prose and poetry). She wrote many other books such as *Jalakridavilasa*, *Muktikantha Vilasa*. In addition she wrote many Kirtans, poems, songs and tattvas. For spiritual aspirants who came spontaneously, she gave invaluable advice about sadhana and subtle philosophical truths. Like Tallapaka Annamayya and Hathiram Baba she shone in splendour as a divinely gifted literary being, a scintilling spiritual presence and finally reached the lotus Feet of Lord Venkateswara on 3 August, 1817. (Sunday, Ishwara year and Sravana Bahula Sashthi). She was given samadhi, in the flower garden she tended and in which she sat regularly in deep contemplation. A mantap and in its middle a structure for Tulsi plant

were built. Across the place below the neredu tree, in a niche there, they installed an image of Anjaneya. That place is called Tarigonda Venkamma Brindavan. Besides daily pooja at her samadhi, on Friday's special worship is offered.

We do not know what it was in the Vedic age but since very ancient times even the spiritually advanced and realized women saints and sages were subjected to constant trials and tribulations. Nevertheless, to those who worship her with faith and devotion Venkamma's continuing presence is revealed and their desires fulfilled. Even after so many years, in 1915, Venkamma revealed herself to the celebrated sage. Sadguru Malayalaswami who was doing tapas in Thumburukona at that time. From this one can understand her unique spiritual stature.

Many of the writings of Tarigonda Venkamma are in print and available. She did not have formal schooling but was gifted with natural genius for the art of poetry. *Nrisimha Sataka* was the first book she wrote perhaps, she was, at that time, a 16-year old widow. But several truths about yoga obviously known by her own experience are found in that.

The majority of her writings are oriented to Bhakti, and Vedanta. There are two books on Yoga: One is *Rajayogamritasara* and the other is *Ashtangayogasara*. The former is a book consisting of 3 chapters and has approximately 900 dwipadas. Among the topics dealt with are: the geneology of the gurus, nature of Sankhyayoga, the Seven Chakras, the ten vayus, explication of the chief nadis, the nature of Swarayoga, denunciation of fake Sadhus and Yogis, the description of Granthis, Tharaka and its qualities, the trinity of mandalas, Sambhavi and Shanmukhi Mudras, Drishtis, elaboration of the Trinity of aims, explanation of those who are not eligible for yoga, the characteristics of those who realised the Brahman, the power of yoga, the nature of Siddhasana. In *Ashtangayogasara*, she expound Mantra, Laya, Hatha, Sankhya, Amanaska and Raja Yoga traditions and their related facets. She explained them lucidly and in a simple style. The author of so many works and an

accomplished Yogini, Tarigonda Venkamma deserves to be remembered continuously.

On 7.12.1996 we visited Venkamma's samadhi. Now it is an English medium school run by Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam. But Venkamma's Brindavan is safe. The image of Anjaneya is now shifted to the garden. For the last six months no worship or any other ritual was being done. The teachers working in the school, however, do pooja every Friday in Brindavana. On a board there, her period is shown as 1750 - 7-8-1817.

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17. KAIVARAM AMARA NAREYANA (1730-1840)

“Sraddhavan Labhate Jnanam” is the axiom of the *Bhagavad Gita*. After half of his life was over, with great faith Amara Nareyana not only realised jnana on his own but also enabled countless seekers to attain self-knowledge. In Telugu among those who foretold the future one can cite Eganti, Pothuluri and Poodhota. Amara Nareyana, too, belongs to this category. Kaivara is a famous village in Chinatamani taluk and Kolar district, where the majority of the inhabitants were Andhras. The village had Ekachakrapura as another name. It is said that Pandavas spent part of their exile here. It is said that this was the place where Bheemasena killed Bakasura. We find here a linga installed by Bheema. In the 18th century, a couple by name Kondappa and Muddamma belonging to the “gajula-baliya” caste lived in Kaivara. They did the business of selling bangles (Gajulu, in Telugu) to eke out a living. In this village there are temples dedicated to Amara Narayana Swami, Bhimalingeswara, and, on the hill Narasimhaswami. Kondappa and Muddamma worshipped these three deities. Their family deity was Amara Narayana Swami. Both husband and wife were great devotees of God and were satisfied with the meagre amount they got by selling bangles and, as befitting householders, served guests and people who came for alms. They didn’t have children for a long time and they prayed to Amara Narayana Swami with great fervour and devotion beseeching Him to grant them a child. After some time, with the Lord’s blessings Muddamma conceived. That was the year (Sadharana = ordinary) 1730. In that ordinary year an extraordinary child was born to her. A gift of the Divine, they named him Amara Narayana.

After becoming a yogi he changed his name as Nareyana. Explaining the significance he said: Nareyana is the seed mantra: If you say Narayana, the power is gone. The supreme Lord Himself made me speak in this way, poet Nareyana the one who delights in the nada, Sound Brahman

He also declared that his book was the essence of the Vedanta of Amara Nareyana, the stanzas were all of Amara Nareyana and his Chosen Deity was Amara Narayana Swami and his own name was Nareyana. Common folk called him Thatha, grandpa. Those who live long are all thathas. Child Nareyana used to go regularly to Amara Narayana temple with his parents and with half-closed eyes used to meditate on God. After finishing primary education he learnt Telugu and Sanskrit on his own. He mastered not only Bhagavata, Bharata and Ramayana but also Bhakti literature. Along with his father he used to go to villages carrying bangles and had darshan of deities in famous pilgrim centers. He got married to Muniyamma, when he came of age. The couple had two sons and one daughter. They were named Pedda Kondappa, Chinna Kondappa and Muddamma. After the parents died, Nareyana's income fell steeply. Besides, whatever he earned selling bangles, Nareyana spent on going to pilgrim centers. Muniyamma found it extremely difficult to bring up the children. One day when Nareyana returned empty-handed, Muniyamma with grief-stricken eyes, showed the starving children and asked piteously: "Who will look after these children?" Nareyana replied: "God who is the refuge of all will Himself look after you and *me and, of course, these children!" Muniyamma smothered her tears. Even as their poverty became acute, Nareyana's devotion deepened and intensified. One day they had to go completely without food. But he remained unmoved. At that time a person who owed money to him came and returned that money. Nareyanappa felt strongly that God Himself came in that form to the rescue of the family.

When he was fifty years of age Nareyanappa went to Mogali Venkatagiri in Chittoor Dist. and after selling bangles rested in this nearby hillocks (ghats). He encountered there a great sage by name Paradesi Swami. He initiated Narayanappa with a mantra. When he asked his guru: "When will this mantra achieve its aim and objective?" the guru replied: "When a pebble in your mouth becomes a sugar candy and melts!" Nareyanappa returned to Kaivara and keeping a pebble in his mouth did intense tapas, for three years, in the Narasimhaswami cave

near Kaivara. After three years of tapas, the pebble melted into sugar. His tapas finally bore fruit. Nareyana came out of the cave and some children there saw him eating pebbles / stone pieces. They pleaded he should feed them also with those stone pieces and when they tasted them they were transformed into sugar. The children went to the village and informed the villagers of this extraordinary event.

Once the villagers who lent money to Nareyana went to the cave to collect their debts. There they saw a strange spectacle. Nareyanappa was in a state of intense samadhi and two cheetahs were guarding him on either side. The people who lent money came out in a sweat, shivering with fear. They ran away without even attempting to approach him. News of Nareyanappa's miracles reached far and wide. Villagers from neighbouring places came in large numbers to worship him. When those who gave money to him came again he asked them to give him some snuff. They said they didn't have snuff and instead, kept a tobacco leaf in his hand. Nareyana pressed the leaf in his palm and said: "Dear! I want some water!" A huge cobra appeared and poured huge jets of water extending his tongue into his palm. The creditors who saw this scene wide-eyed were dumbstruck with fear. Abandoning the idea of recovering their dues they went into the village and consulted the elders. They felt that it didn't augur well if a sage like Nareyanappa lived on the outskirts of the village and his stay in the village itself would be extremely good for all of them. They therefore decided to bring him to the village. They went in a group to request him to come back to the village and with love and compassion he agreed.

The village elders built a cottage and made him live in that. That cottage was there exactly in the place where the present Nareyana Yogi Math is situated. The aswattha plant he planted then has become now a huge tree and is receiving worship now, regularly. Sage and Yogi Nareyana lived in that cottage and gave spiritual instruction to seekers who thronged to him. He taught them devotion, supreme knowledge and detachment. The afflicted and the curious thronged to him and went away getting blessed with whatever they wanted. Whenever he had

time, Nareyanappa used to write on palm leaves countless bhajans, poems, satakas, tattvas and tracts which foretold the future.

As things were going on in this way, his family guru came to Kaivara as part of his itinerary to various places. His disciples in the village had his darshan and gave him gifts proportionate to their station in life. But Nareyanappa didn't go to see him and even after the guru sent word, he refused to go to him. The guru himself went too see Nareyana and asked him why he refused to come and see him. Nareyanappa said: "I have my own guru. I don't have anything to do with you. If you really want to be considered as my guru, you will have to stay in a pit dug in the ground, for three months, in a state of samadhi and then come up." The guru, alas! was not a spiritual preceptor but one who came every year to collect his dues. He was not an adept in yoga and he told Nareyanappa: "Why don't you do that yourself?" "Then you will have to stay here for three months and guard the place!" The guru thought: "If I stay here what would happen to my travels and what would happen, specially, to the money I have to collect." Even as he was thinking in this way, a huge python fell from a tree nearby. Seizing the opportunity the pseudo-guru and his sishyas took to their heels and ran away. From a distance they saw the serpent stretch its hood and sway above Nareyana's head. The guru and his disciples realised that Nareyanappa was a great Mahatma. They went and pleaded for his forgiveness and left.

As soon as he got up in the morning Nareyanayogi used to come out of his cottage and cry loudly "Krishna!" Instantly a Garudabird used to come. He used to do namaskar and sing a hymn in its praise. Seeing this, some mischievous Muslim youth mocked him and made fun of this, for them, a queer habit. They said that he is a mad fellow who goes on saluting crows and other birds. They made a bird-like thing with clay and kept it on the branch of a tree. As usual the next morning Nareyanappa came out of the cottage and cried aloud : "Krishna!". But lo and behold! The clay bird came to life, accepted his salutations and flew away. The mischievous youth who watched this realised that the yogi was not an ordinary fake

sadhu. From that time onwards, they came with their elders and saluted him. They developed intense faith, devotion and respect for the yogi.

Once Nareyanappa went to visit a disciple by name Puwappa at his own request, who lived in Vadigepalli of Devanapalli taluk. The weather at that time was very hot and humid and people were drenched in sweat. One of the devotees there spontaneously said - unable to bear the heat, how nice it would be to have rain at that moment. Nareyanappa heard these words and taking pity, told Puwappa, "Look after my body without attempting to talk to me." And asked the others to leave. Since he was capable of entering another body - the siddhi of Parakayapravesa - he left his body behind and went off to where none knew. Puwappa carefully guarded his guru's body. That night there was heavy rain. The climate of Vadigepalli cooled down. The devotees were amazed at this event and bowed to the guru with respect and devotion. Since the rain blessed everyone, all the villagers came and paid their profound respects to Nareyanappa. Rain inundated the streets of Vadigepalli but there was no drop of rain outside the village. The villagers felt that the master assumed another body and made one cloud bringing rain only in that village. Permanent citizens of the village like Shahukar Appayya, Syamappa and others, seeing this miracle, became the Master's devotees.

The book published by the Amara Nareyanaswami Trust in 1984 is a collection of the Swami's writings. It also contains many pictures showing his divine life. Many of them are instances of the miracles he performed.

Nareyana Yogindra lived for a long time. In his 110th year he declared he would give up his body on 2-6-1840, (Tuesday, Jyeshtha Shuddha Tadiya) in the night at 12'o clock. By that day devotees arrived from distant places. The final bhajan began. When everyone was intensely immersed in the chanting and singing, as foretold, the Swami gave up his body. The next day, the devotees kept the Swami's body in a flower-decked chariot and took it out in procession. Strangely, as they were taking the body in procession, the body sweated! At this miraculous event, the devotees were overjoyed and praised the Swami. His gross body

was cremated in the place selected beforehand. To this day, devotees offer worship at this samadhi and get their desires fulfilled.

Amara Nareyanayogi, like Pothuluri Veerabrahmam and Poodota Lingavadhuta, attracted all types of devotees and leading them in the virtuous path, served society and did immense good to the country. A great Mahatma, and a gifted writer, he condemned pomposity, violence, superstitious conventions which did immense harm, and through his writings propagated devotion, knowledge, a spirit of renunciation and good conduct. He wrote his books in a simple way explaining to the common people the abstract ideas of spiritual and ethical conduct. He used literary modes such as metaphor, simile, etc., to explain them in an easily understandable way. He wrote not only songs and poems but also satakas and he had an excellent knowledge of music. There are raga and thala for all his compositions. His book *Amara Narayna Vedanta Saravali* published in 1984 contains many of his kirtans, stotras, and such texts as *Sri Krishna Charitha Tattvamrita Yogasara*.

We get in these books accounts of his travels and the names of the deities he worshipped. Among these, one finds Yanangipura Sadasiva, Kendanapalle Hanuman, Vadigepura Chennakesava, Nagendrapuri Gopala, Muddurulamma, Kollapura Masidi Maremma, Satyapuram Lakshmi, Dabbakunta Hanumantha, Papanapalle Chandraskeharaswami, Yanangipura Gopala, Alamgiri Venkataramana, Devanapuri Gopala, and Akasapuri Chennaraya.

Nareyanayogi had a progressive social outlook free from distinction of caste, color and creed. He took to task those who propagated rivalry between Shaivaites and Vasihnavaites and Muslim clerics who ignored the real message of Allah. He declared that a Brahmin who has no experience of Brahman is no Brahmin at all. "Why are you calling and condemning him as a mala, an outcaste? In the temple of his Self, don't you find the Indweller of All dwelling?" He asked pointedly and stood behind the outcastes, and becoming thereby a pillar of strength to them. Detecting the falsity of so-called yogis etc he cautioned: "Some call

themselves yogi sanyasis, some as Avadhutas, some Mounis, some as Brahmajnanis -do not have faith in such" people. "You can repay the debt of parents, but the guru's debt you can never repay; there is no disciple who can repay the guru's debt," he affirmed, extolling the greatness of the true guru. He also condemned poetry without Atmajnana, knowledge of the self.: "They strut about as great poets; why poetry which has no reflection of self-knowledge?" he asked. He dismissed pseudo-logicians - tharka pandits - by calling their dialectical games as "the barking and quarrelling of the dogs." He extolled Valmiki, Narada, Shuka, Vyasa and yogi Vemana" as "really knowledgeable people". "Like asking for coconuts in a brinjal garden, search only for those who have knowledge of the Self and its direct experience. At many places he reminds us of Vemana, Pothana. The Swami composed a lengthy kirtan resembling "Pahi Ramaprabho" composed by Bhadrachala Ramadas. In his Kalajnana, Nareyana Yogi tells many things on the social, political conditions in future: government, the plight of the people, the aberrations of Nature, commerce, religion, the evil conventions in religions, the behavior of men and women, foreign rule, the dawn of Indian independence, the incarnation of Punyapurusha, etc. All these resemble the predictions of Potuluri Veerabrahmam and they say that all the predictions he made have come true.

Muthuswami was Nareyana Yogi's chief disciple. He worshipped his guru as God Himself and living very near his guru's samadhi in a cottage, he used to tell devotees about the greatness of their guru and, also look after the samadhi. One day the village tank was inundated and overflowed. The floods threatened to submerge his guru's samadhi. Muthuswami perched himself on the guru's samadhi, prayed earnestly and meditated on him. The current of water, as a consequence, flowed around the samadhi but didn't touch it even remotely. Villagers who saw this strange spectacle, offered huge donations for the upkeep of the Swami's samadhi. A managing committee was formed to look after the ashram. Through- donations from devotees, they built a Mandir and a Math and started regular worship and other activities. After Muthuswami Lingachaiya

and after the latter, his disciple Muniyavadhuta, and then his disciple Balavadhuta (Batchappaswami) became Presidents of ashram and developed the ashram in a devoted, systematic way. When M.S. Ramaiah the great philanthropist of Bangalore became the president of the ashram he developed it in multifarious ways. M.S.Jayaram who succeeded his father is doing yeoman service to the ashram and the devotees of Amara Nareyana. Nareyanaswami has another ashram near Madanapalli. We had the good fortune to have the darshan of the ashram, many times.

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18. TUNGADURTIBUCCHAYYA (1760-1854)

Persons who did sadhana for self-realisation in their previous birth and left their body in that state achieve fulfillment of their aim in their next birth. With the very initiation into a mantra from their guru all the secrets of sacred scriptures become evident and they achieve perfection in all the siddhis (Yogic powers) at a very young age. Tungadurti Bucchayya is one among such siddhas. He lived from the middle of the 18th century to the middle of the 19th century. We do not know for certain his date of birth but we do know of his passing away. We do not know the place of his birth or details about his parents but we do know the names of those who brought him up and the places he travelled through. From his childhood to the end of his life, he lived in the Kapotheswara temple at Chejerla. Chejerla is a very ancient place of great historical importance. It is in the Narasraopeta taluk of Guntur district. It was conquered by the Kandara kings from the Pallavas in 3rd century B.C. Earlier, it was the Kandarapura which had some relation with the Jathaka of Baudhha Sibi. Historians are of the opinion that it was the same Baudhha Chaitya which later on became Kapotheswara temple. The inscriptions and remnants of the temples there are evidences for this. Besides the ancient inscriptions, there was one inscription, in the name of Kapotheswara Swami laid down by Bucchayya on 17th December, 1798. He attained mahasamadhi on 7-9-1854. His woman disciple Koorapati Acchamma died on 11-11-1887. By the time Bucchayya got the inscription made, he must have been of middle age. Probably born around 1760 he passed away in 1854. Besides Kapotheswara temple, Chejerla has many other temples. Moreover towards the north, at a distance of a furlong, there is the Kumaraswami hill, towards the west at a distance of two miles there is Meghala Malleswaraswami hill and within that the Jeemoothvahana cave, the Math associated with Soorayya Avadhuta and at a distance of 2 furlongs, the Anjaneyaswami temple are some of these landmarks.

According to the history of the Kapotheswara Kshetra (Pilgrim place), Bucchayya belonged to a village called Inumella. Or, he lived in Nekarikallu of Narasavrapet taluk. He belonged to the Karanakamma sect of the Vaidik Brahmins and his gothra was "Kama-KayanaViswamitra". He hailed from the Rigvedic branch. He had no education and right from childhood he used to do agricultural work. One day, while he was tilling the land near Mallikarjuna Swami hill, he felt thirsty and went inside the cave in that hill. There he had the darshan of a great sage to whom Bucchayya prostrated with great devotion. The sage felt compassion for him and initiated him into the "Madhumati" form of sadhana by inscribing mantric letters on his tongue. From that very day Bucchayya became a poet, a jnani and one gifted with powers. He entered the Kapotheswara temple and composed hymns in praise of the deity. In the initial stages, he lived for some time with one Dammavalam Rangasayi of Kunkalakunta and went to Kapotheswara temple every day, did Abhisheka there and then went back to Rangasayi's house for his meal. Once he went as usual to Chejerla but did not return to Kunkalakunta. Rangasayi went and pleaded with him to return. But Bucchayya lived in the Kapotheswara temple until the end of his life. He used to roam in the surrounding villages. He used to eat if anyone gave, and return to the temple and live there. He held a goading stick in his hand. He was fair in complexion and short in stature.

However, according to Panguluri Veeraraghavaudu's account, Bucchayya was born in Kurichedu village of Vinukonda taluk. He lost his parents at the age of 7. Since he did not have any relatives, he left Kurichedu, crossed the forest and reached the Kapotheswara temple in Chejerla. The inhabitants of that village fed him with great affection and concern. During the day, he used to play with the children of the village and eat whatever was given. By nightfall, he went back to Kapotheswara temple to sleep there. However much the villagers compelled him, he did not go to the house of any householder. He was 8 years old when Kunkalagunta Basavayya saw him roaming in the streets of the village. Curious to know, he asked him whose son he was of the village. Bucchayya replied, "I am the son of Kapotheswara."

Basavayya felt something of a divine will and taking the boy in his arms, took him home and placed him in his wife's hands saying, "This boy is the gift of Lord Kapotheswara." That lady looked after Bucchayya as her own son. The couple performed the thread ceremony of Bucchayya and sent him to school. In one year, Bucchayya became an adept in all branches of learning. But neither the teacher nor the parents recognized this fact. For Bucchayya was not only irregular in going to school but was also very mischievous in his behaviour at home. However, since divine radiance shone on his face, they felt extremely gratified to just have him at home.

Suddenly, one night Bucchayya disappeared. Basavayya searched everywhere but in vain. Pining for their darling child, he became bed-ridden unable to bear the separation. They say that love for a foster child is stronger than for one's own child. Unexpectedly Bucchayya appeared at his bedside and told him: "Father! I implicitly follow the injunctions of Kapotheswara. Do not grieve for me. After the expiry of 12 years. I shall return to Chejerla and look after you until your end. Behold! The Lord Kapotheswara Himself is here to console you! Do prostrations to the Lord! "Bucchayya instantly got up, embraced his dear son and did pranams to the Lord who stood there in His luminous form. Then he addressed him: "Lord! Did you come to give this gift of separation from my son? Let thy will - whatever it is - be done. Of little concern am I. But give me the blessing, that whenever I wish, my son should come and show himself to me! With your darshan, all my cumulated ignorance is dispelled. That's enough for me." The Lord acceded to his wish and instantly, along with Bucchayya, vanished.

Bucchayya went to Sririgiri and did intense tapas there for six years, giving up food and sleep he used to break his samadhi for a week or a fortnight and eat raw vegetables or leaves. In the 7th year, he entered his native village Kurichedu and lived in a temple. Ayyavarappa Sastri, a resident of the village had a dream in which a Divine Being appeared and told him: "Tungadurti Bucchayya who is ripe and rich with intense tapas is in the temple. He, formerly, hailed from our village. Moreover, he is related

to you. Bring him with due honors to our home and be blessed.” So saying the Divine Personage vanished. Ayyavarappa Sastri accordingly went to Bucchayya and with reverence invited him to his home.

This Sastri is also a holy man who attained perfection in the practice of pranayama. He was a great ascetic. He had three sons. Their descendants are living in Kurichedu to this day. After staying in Sastri’s place for some time, when Bucchayya started out to go to Chejerla, Sastri pleaded: “I am 80 years old. I have to leave the body soon. Please stay until then. After that you can leave this place”. Bucchayya told him, “Such a thing will not happen soon, as you think. I shall return. Then you leaving the body will happen in my presence.” So saying, Bucchayya went to Chejerla, had darshan of Kapotheswara and stayed for some days in the house of his foster parents. After some time he went, again, to Srisailam and plunged into tapas, again.

One day Bucchayya went for the darshan of Bhramaramba. The goddess appeared before him and the image moved. When the priests asked for money to reinstall the image, Bucchayya, with his tremendous power, installed the image in her original place and completed the connected rituals. The image now being worshipped is the one reinstalled by Bucchayya himself. At one time Goddess Bhramaramba gave her darshan to Bucchayya and directed him to install the Devi’s image in the Kapotheswara temple in Chejerla. Bucchayya accordingly went to Chejerla, told the elders of the village about Goddess Bhramarambika’s command and receiving their consent, brought the image of Goddess Parvathi from Durgi in Palnadu district and installed it in the sanctum sanctorum of the temple at Chejerla. He then remained in Chejerla. In accordance with the assurance he gave, he went to see Ayyavarappa on his death bed and this made him immensely happy. The related rituals were undertaken in Bucchayya’s presence.

Bucchayya was blessed with the psychic powers such as flying in the sky, etc., right from his childhood. With his mere wish, he used to go and visit distant pilgrim centers. But wherever he happened to be, at the time

of the descent of the linga bn Sivaratri, he was without fail present in Kapotheswara temple in Chejerla. At the same time-simultaneously-he was seen in Srisailam, Kasi, Rmeswaram, and even the cave inGuttikonda. In the same way, on the holy day of "Mukkoti", he was seen in many pilgrim places all over the country. However, Bucchayya's meditative places were (1) Chejerla Kapotheswara temple, (2) The cave in Guttikonda and (3) Srisailam. Wherever he was, once in a month he used to appear before his foster father to make him happy.

Here are some miracles that Bucchayya did. Raja Malraju Lakshmayyammaraao was Bucchayya's disciple. She used to invite him and offer worship to him whenever there was a calamity. Once she sent her people to bring him and Bucchayya accompanied them to give her his darshan. After going for some distance, Bucchayya lagged behind others and within no time vanished completely. Those who accompanied him were stupefied and began to look for him desperately. At the same moment, Bucchayya appeared before them. They asked him, surprised: "Where did you go, Sir? We were frantically searching for you everywhere!" Bucchayya told them that he had already gone to see the Rani and therefore, he told them, they had better all go back.

A similar incident. One day some devotees from Murikipudi came to take Bucchayya to their village. They all started off on horses. After some distance, they found plenty of cucumbers in a field. They felt like eating them. They alighted from their horses entered the field and ate the luscious cucumbers to their heart's content and came back to the edge of the field. But to their surprise, they found that they were very near the fields of their village, Murikipudi with their horses. They were surprised how within that short time, they could cover so much distance.

Once Bucchayya was suffering from fever. But the daily activities were going on. At the time of taking his bath, he went to the well and pitching his walking stick on the ground there, transferred his fever to that walking stick. He then took his bath and completed his sandhya and other items of his pooja. Then he got the fever transferred to his body

again. One of the devotees who saw this asked him: "Can't you, sir, who have so much evident power, get cured of the fever?" Then Bucchayya told him, "One has to experience cumulative Karma-prarabdha. Who can escape it?" The *Kapotheshwarashtaka* is one of his compositions in praise of Kapotheswara linga.

On 6-9-1854 Thursday, Bucchayya got severe pain on top of the head. He immediately called for his devotees and told them: "Today is my samadhi. Make me lie in such a place that I can have a clear view of Lord Kapotheswara." With eyes full of tears, the devotees did accordingly. Bucchayya entered a deep meditative state directing his gaze to Kapotheswara. After some time, the top of the skull was ripped open and life flew away from the body. His body was cremated with all honors and appropriate rituals in the premises of first compound wall. And Koorapati Acchamma who served the Swami with great devotion, breathed her last on 11.11.1887. She was cremated beside the samadhi of her guru. Every year celebrations are held in honor of these two great persons.

Sources:

1. *Andhra Mahabhakta Vijayamu vol. I by Panguluri Veeraraghavudu, Appikarla. 1957.*
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19. PENAKACHARLA CHITHAMBARA SWAMI (1772-1872)

Andhradesa has received the grace and blessings of Dattatreya in full. His first incarnate form Sripada Srivallbha(1323-1344) was born in Pirthapuram. From then onwards many yogis were born in Andhra who embodied the aspects of Dattatreya. Among such great masters, Sri Penakacharla Chithambara Swami was one. Penakacherla village is ten miles away from Garladinne railway station on the bank of Penna river, in Anantapur district. There we have the samadi of the Swami. To the north east of Anantapur, about 12 miles away is situated Singanamala agrahara (Brahmin quarters of the village). It was the abode of scholars, Vedic savants and virtuous God-fearing people. The big tank there was the source of cultivating hundreds of acres nearby and this was the main source of sustenance for people there. It is said in the legends of the place that the great sage Rishyasringa did tapas in the mountains to the north. There is a stone image of Rishyasringa there which to this day is worshipped with reverence. The people believe, if they have any draught conditions, worship of Rishyasringa brings rains. In a Brahmin Vaidik family of Singanamala, Chitambara Swami was born in the second half of the 18th century. His parents names are not known; Viswanathayya was his brother's name.

We do not know for certain when the Swami was born. In the 19th Century, according to the Hindu calendar, the Prajotpatti year (1811- 1812,1871 -72) occurred twice. In the first year, the sacred Sivaratri day fell on Monday, 10-2-1812; in the second it occurred on Thursday 7-3- 1872. We also find the famous English officer Sir Thomas Monroe figure in the life of this Swami. He was born in 1769 and died on 6-7-1827. Therefore, on the basis of Chithambaraswami's foretelling of Monroe's death we can say with certainty that the Swami passed away on the second Sivaratri day in the second Prajotpatti year, i.e., 7-3-1872. Monroe was the English officer who got the Ceded districts surveyed and

introduced the ryotwari system between 1802-1805. He worked as Collector until 1807. With the blessings of Chithambara Swami in 1820 he became the Governor of the Madras state. He functioned in this capacity for seven years, did many welfare works and before going back to his country he had darshan of the Swami. But unfortunately he was a victim of cholera and died. 1802 was the year when Monroe was put in charge of the Ceded districts. Chithambara Swami must have been by that time in his middle age. His brother was Viswanathayya whose son was Venkata Subba Sastri. Chithambara Swami who named Venkata Subbasastri's son after himself, must have been 70 years old at that time. Therefore, the Swami lived for the full span of life ordained by the Vedas. We can infer that he was born in the year 1772. Like Sir Arthur Cotton (1803-1899) who built the Godavari barrage, and Sir C.P. Brown (1798- 1884) who did yeoman service to Telugu literature, Sir Thomas Monroe made unique contribution to the Rayalaseema region. He introduced the ryotwari revenue system and saved the farmers from the iron grip of famine, renovated the temples in Pedda Chippali, Jammalamadugu, Mantralaya and Rayadurga. He had the darshan of Raghavendraswami of Mantralaya and Prasanna Venkateswaraswami of Rayadurga and was the recipient of Chithambara Swami's blessings. He is thus eternally remembered by the Telugus.

At a very early age itself, the Swami showed unique verbal ability, scholarship and proficiency. After the thread ceremony he participated in Vedantic and Veda colloquiums and exhibited miraculous powers. Immersed in the ineffable joy of satchidananda, he used to roam in the area disregarding all distinctions of caste, color and creed. The orthodox Brahmin community unable to tolerate this, excommunicated him from the community. Though his father felt proud of his son's achievements, in his heart of hearts he was filled with sorrow. One day a big feast was held for the Brahmins. If the Swami came they thought, the feast would be defiled. Therefore, they locked him up in a room. Just at that moment two emissaries brought a letter from the Jagadguruji of Sringeri Math. The letter informed that Chithambra Swami was just then at Sringeri

seated before the pontiff. It exhorted all to consider Chitambara Swami as an incarnation of God. This is the substance of the letter from the Jagadguru of Sringeri. The Brahmin emissaries who brought the letter desired to see the revered Swami. The Singanamala Brahmins ran hastily and opened the door of the room in which they had locked up Chithambara Swami. They found him in a state of infinite joy and reciting the Vedic mantras. The Brahmins prostrated to him. The emissaries were struck dumb at the miracle of Chithambara Swami being seen simultaneously at Sringeri and at Singanamala. The Singanamala Brahmins slapped their cheeks in repentance.

Chithambara Swami was duly married to Lakshamma. One auspicious day the couple were sent inside a room for nuptials. In the bedroom, the Swami started playing on the Veena and the enchanting music was shared by his wife. The day dawned and that was the end of their marital privacy. After this they never entered the bedroom again. The family had to undergo many trials and tribulations on the sudden death of Chithambara Swami's father. The Swami was indifferent to family affairs. One day when the Swami's mother asked him about performing the thread ceremony of his brother Viswanathayya, the Swami said: "Don't get worried. Go in the direction of east with my brother and you will find anklets - Gajjelu in Telugu - and that will solve your problem." The mother knew that her son's words were unfailingly prophetic and she thought that she would be going in the direction indicated by the Swami - they would find golden anklets. That would solve their problem. They would sell the anklets and with that money perform Viswanathayya's thread ceremony. In the morning they went in the direction indicated by the Swami. They looked for golden anklets - Gajjelu - every inch of the way. By noon, they couldn't withstand the intense heat and sat under a tree in the shade. They were tortured by hunger and thirst. A horse-rider who came that way recognized them and getting to know the reason for their travelling like this said: "The gajjelu-anklets-that our Swami was telling you about is none other than myself. For, my name is Gajjelappa. The Swami appeared to me in a dream and entrusted the job of performing

the thread-ceremony of your son Viswanathayya to me.” He took them in comfort to his village and got the thread ceremony performed with the usual rituals.

Chithambara Swami used to travel in the districts of Anathapur, Kurnool and Bellary and also occasionally come to Singanamala. After sometime Viswanathayya’s marriage was performed. From the income he got officiating as a priest and the income from the land they had, he looked after his mother and his wife. Once Chithambara Swami went to Peravali village near Patthikonda in the Kurnool district. There Ranganatha Swami, a relative of the Swami lived. All the children born to him used to die in no time. Unable to bear the grief, Ranganatha Swami, prayed to Chithambara Swami. Blessed by him, a girl-child was born to them. The Swami took the days-old child into his hands and blessing her asked: “This child I shall choose as my daughter-in-law. What is your opinion?” Thinking that the child who would become the Swami’s daughter-in-law will live long-unlike his other children who died prematurely-Ranganatha Swami told suggestively: “Tell us what ornaments you will give our child. Then I will think about it.” The Swami said that he will heap the girl with mounds of gold. The child was named Rangamma and after her coming of age, she was married to Venkatasubbasastri, son of the Swami’s brother, Viswanathayya. When Rangamma gave birth consecutively to girls, Venkatasubbasastri sought the blessings of the Swami for a male child. The Swami blessed him saying that he will himself, personally, christen the male child to be born. Sastri had a child as per the Swami’s blessings. Sastri made all arrangements for the boy’s naming ceremony and waited for the Swami’s arrival. The Swami arrived at the exact moment of the muhurtham and gave the boy his own name, blessed him and vanished.

Continuous failure of rains for three years made the Singanamala tank dry up. There was a severe famine. Incapable of invoking the gods for rain in their destitute condition, they represented their plight to Anantapur collector, Thomas Monroe. Among the British rulers, Monroe was a very good man. Besides a man of faith, he had a lot of respect for Hindu religion and culture. Earlier in 1800, the Rayalaseema districts,

long oppressed by the Nizam and the feudal rulers, acceded to the British. Monroe got the lands surveyed and introduced the ryotwari system and did great service to Rayalaseema. The people of Rayalaseema regarded him as a divine personage. They regarded him as the reincarnation of the great ancient sage Mandavya. The Delhi Sultan honoured him with the title “Mumtajimuddoula” (Eminent Administrator).

Monroe listened to the plight of the Singanamala people and visited the village to assess the situation personally. He sanctioned from the government treasury Rs. 2000/- towards the performance of rituals invoking the onset of rain. He, however, warned them that if the rituals fail to bring rain, the lands would be annexed as government lands. The Brahmins did, accordingly, several rituals but not a drop of rain came. The seventh day also arrived. The inhabitants of the agrahara stricken with fear and helplessness finally prayed to Chithambara Swami. Like Lord Srimannarayana who came to protect the elephant from the crocodile, Chithambara Swami suddenly appeared from behind the hill. He gave them courage and joy. The Swami took a dip in the pond and standing before the image of Rishyasringa composed extempore five poems in honour of Rishyasringa with the tag word “Rishyasringa”. Instantly, the sky was overcast with dark clouds and heavy rain fell. The Swami vanished. The food prepared for the feast got inundated by the waters. The drought-stricken Singamala tank overflowed with water by morning.

Monroe came from Bellary in the morning after the stipulated period. Though there were no signs of any rain throughout his travel, when he found Singanamala tank filled with water, he was delighted beyond measure and filled with surprise. He tendered his thanks and gratitude to the villagers. He was filled with curiosity to have darshan of Chithambara Swami who made the rain possible. He learnt that the Swami was in a village near the hillock. Monroe went there forthwith and doing pranams to the Swami made him be seated on a horse and brought him to Singanamala following him on foot. After reaching Singanamala, he completed the ceremony of honoring the Swami. From that time, Monroe had great devotion to the

Swami and used to come to have his darshan often. Owing to the blessing of the Swami, Monroe was conferred the honor of this title 'SIR' and also became the Governor of Madras. For seven years he held office and was an extremely popular officer with the people. Before he left for England, he went to have the darshan of the Swami. At that moment, the Swami was digging a trench in the burial ground of Pattikonda. After Monroe prostrated to him and stood up, the Swami said: "The dogs are coming please leave!" On his way back Monroe fell a victim of cholera and succumbed. With the permission of the Zamindar of Maddikera, LakshmappaNaidu, the Englishman's body was taken in a palanquin and buried below Guttikonda (Hill). This samadhi is still there on the Guttikonda - Kumool highway. In his memory, a choultry was built there. In memory of Monroe's first darshan of the Swami, a tank was dug and a statue of Monroe Sahib was set up there in a grove of tamarind trees.

The Swami's devotees, Rudravaram Venkata Subbayya, lived in Kristipadu of Gutti taluk. Once when he was about to go on a pilgrimage to Tirupati, the Swami arrived. The Swami stopped his journey, saying that there was no need to undergo several hardships and go there. "I shall make you have darshan of Lord Venkateswara here itself," he declared. He asked all those present to close their eyes and meditate on the Lord. When they did that, the Lord Venkateswara appeared before them along with his two consorts. They also saw the many pilgrim centers situated in Tirupati and Tirumala. The money Venkata Subbayya would have spent on the journey to Tirumala, he used to feed the poor and in serving the Swami.

Humnabad is the sacred place Manikyaprabhu (1817-1865), an incarnate form of Dattatreya, chose as the holy Kshetra. Govindswami who was born in that holy place served Manikyaprabhu and Chaitanya Swami with great devotion and dedication. He implored them to give him deeksha, initiation. They told him that his guru was none other than Chithambara Swami and advised him to go to the Swami and seek deeksha from him. He searched for him and eventually reached Krishtipadu. At that time the Swami was doing a pooja which lasted seven days.

Govindaswami told the Swami about Manikya Prabhu's command to go and seek deeksha from him. The guru always tests a disciple before conferring his favour and blessings. Chithambara Swami also made Govinda Swami his disciple and subjected him to several severe tests. Govinda Swami started serving the Swami in several ways. On the day, the seven-day worship ended, Venkata Subbayya of Rudravaram adorned the Swami with several ornaments and took him out in a procession in a palanquin. Govinda Swami accompanied Chithambara Swami. Returning from the procession the Swami while entering Venkata Subbayya's house, threw away the necklace he was adorned with to a corner and it landed below a bam. This was done without anyone noticing it. While removing the ornaments, Venkata Subbayya discovered that the necklace was missing. He asked Govinda Swami about it, but intoxicated with the joy of participating in the holy procession, he didn't even hear what Subbayya was saying and therefore no reply came from him. Venkata Subbayya and others mistook this and suspected Govinda Swami as the thief. When they asked the Swami, he simply smiled and kept quiet. Silence is acceptance, they thought and thrashed Govinda Swami severely. At every blow, Govinda Swami only uttered the holy name of his guru and neither cried with pain nor prevented them from beating him up. After his innocent disciple was subject to this cruelty, Chithambara Swami took pity on him. He felt happy that the disciple came out with flying colors from his testing. He showed the place where the necklace was to be found. Guilty that they tortured an innocent person, Venkata Subbayya and others prayed to the Swami to forgive them. Accepting everything that the guru's testing subjected him to, Govinda Swami became the Swami's dear disciple.

The Swami often used to visit Bhogeswara Swami temple at Pamidi on the banks of the river Pinakini. Practising Lambika Yoga, he used to lie clasping the ceiling of the temple, like a lizard. Women devotees who came for darshan of the deity saw this and stopped coming to the temple. One day a devotee by name Rachamadugu Ramachandraiah, after worshipping the Swami's feet, told him about this. The Swami stopped doing Lambika Yoga, in the temple forthwith.

Hearing about Chitamban Swami's powers, a woman in the village Pamidi surrendering herself to him, asked him to bless her with a child. Once that woman encountered the Swami who was returning from Aloor to Pamidi. The Swami looked at her, smiled and approaching her pinched the tip of her breast. The relatives who were with her and others who were not aware of the Swami's powers, burst into anger and thrashed him mercilessly. And then buried him in the sands of Pinakini river. It was the rainy season and it was flooded with water. After four days when they dug out at the place the Swami was buried, he got up nonchalantly and began walking speedily. They were all terrified. After some days when that woman died from snake-bite, her body was brought to the bank of the river for cremation. The Swami arrived there like a bolt from the blue, quite unexpectedly, and knowing about the woman's death pinched again at the same place on the woman's breast that he pinched earlier. He removed the bark-like covering which formed at that place. Poisonous blood gushed out from that spot and the woman regained consciousness. She looked around and did pranams to the Swami. The persons who saw this miracle praised the Swami's supernatural powers and hailed him as a great saviour. Later on, that woman had also a child. Her descendants are to be found in Pamidi to this day.

A person by name Sarana Ramayya was longing to have the darshan of Kasi Visweswara. But because of lack of adequate money for travel, his desire was not fulfilled. On the very day when the woman was restored to life, he beseeched the Swami to fulfill his desire. The Swami told him. "Very near you there is money, Why worry for it?" and showed a particular spot. When they dug at that spot, they found a treasure. When Ramayya asked the Swami to kindly come to Kasi along with him, the Swami said he would meet him there. When Ramayya reached Kasi along with his family and was about to take a dip in the Ganga, the Swami appeared and made him do all the traditional worship there. When the Swami was in Kasi, it was said that devotees at various villages took the Swami ceremonially in a procession seating him in a palanquin. His presence at

various places at the same time made Chithambara Swami an extraordinary Mahatma.

A childless couple living in a village called Poliki prayed to the Swami to bless them with a child. A child was born and he was a gift of the Swami, was named after the Swami himself. After twelve years, the Swami himself gave initiation to the boy. Later on he went to Kasi, became highly proficient in traditional learning, became an adept in yogic practices, showed many siddhis and finally reached Dronachalam (in A.P.). He was highly venerated in and around Dronachalam as a great yogi and ultimately attained samadhi there itself.

Lingabalija Mallappa Swami was a disciple of Chithambara Swami and, after receiving sanyas from him, established a Math at Penakacharla. Narapa Reddy, Papanna, Hampayya, Pallikonda, etc., were his disciples. Narapa Reddy belonged to the inner circle. Once the head of a Math at Uravakonda, - one by name Karibasappa Swami - came and stayed at Mallappa Swami's Math. On that day when Mallappa Swami was giving a discourse on the greatness of his guru, Chithambara Swami arrived. The Swami was received with honours and was taken out in a procession, riding on an elephant. Even as the procession moved, the Swami vanished and was seen eating Ragi gruel in Kuruba Basanna's house. Mallappa and Kari Basappa Swamis went to Basanna's place and requested the Swami to come and give darshan to the devotees. They distributed the remaining Ragi gruel taken by the Swami as prasada to the devotees.

Chithambara Swami sent for devotees such as Mallappa on Prajotpatthi Magha Bahula Dasami and informed them that he would give up his body on Trayodasi. He instructed them to make necessary arrangements for his cremation under a Jasmine tree in the Math premises itself. Hearing the news, devotees from Anantapur, Pamidi, Uravakonda, Ramagiri, Aloor, Krishtipadu, Ravaludiki, Konakandla and other places rushed to the Math and had the Swami's darshan. Karanam Papanna of Marutla village wanted the Swami to be cremated in his own village and made all arrangements for it. On Magha Bahula Trayodasi, the Swami entered

the state of Lambika yoga in the temple premises of Mallikarjuna Swami. Devotees from various villages were intent on cremating the Swami in their own villages. The Reddy and Karanam of Penakacherla village declared that the Swami should not be cremated in Penakacherla village. But Mallappa Swami was very keen on cremating him in Penakacherla itself. Chithambara Swami returned from samadhi and cursing the Reddy and Karanam, declared that Penakacherla will be doomed. When the devotees fell at his feet and implored him to revoke the curse, the Swami was pacified and blessed that Penakacherla will become Repallevada. He then entered the state of samadhi as before. Owing to the blessings of the Swami, the Pennar project is built there today and as a result Penakcherla is now famous as a very important village in Anantapur district.

Chithambara Swami remained in samadhi for three days and passed away on Sivaratri day: Thursday, 7.3.1872, in the evening hours. He was cremated at the place indicated by the Swami, with due honors, amidst chanting and singing. Every year beginning on the Sivaratri day, for three days celebrations are held in honor of the Swami. Mallappa Swami continued this until his death. Sensing the end as nearing, he handed over the Math to Koppalakonda Narapareddy as the trustee, and went back to his native village Aloor. He established a Math there and attained samadhi there. For the annual celebrations at Penakacherla, thousands of the Swami's devotees come from Kadapa, Kurnool and Bellary districts. There is distribution of annaprasad. Narapareddy's descendants continue to be the trustees. His son Venkata Reddy and then his sons Chidambara Reddy and Venkatrami Reddy and at present Parameswara Reddy functioned as trustees and hold the annual celebrations.

The Swami's Aradhana celebrations are held in Marutla, Peddapappur and Matlagondi villages. During Venkata Reddy's tenure as the trustee, Ramananda Yogi was the priest of the Swami's temple and did much for the development of the temple. His disciple Marutla Narapa Reddy later became the temple priest and did yeoman service for its further development. Four years before Venkata Reddy's demise, he selected a

youth by name Appajipeta Umamaheswarlu as the priest. Ramananda was cremated in the Math premises itself and the anniversary is celebrated with due honors to this day.

Among the yogi disciples of Chithambara Swami, the most prominent was Poliki Chidambara Swami. He was a great master of many siddhis, occult powers. It is said that his samadhi is in Dronachalam. Thikka Rangayya Swami, a great Avadhuta, a Vaishnava, belonging to Krishtipadu, was Poliki Chidambara Swami's disciple. He lived for more than a hundred years and performed many miracles in the districts of Ananthapur, Kadapa and Kumool. Several Maths were established by his disciples at many places. The samadhi of Thikka Rangayya Swami is to be found near the compound wall of the oil mills of Gongadi Ramappa in Ananthapur.

We had darshan of the samadhi of Penkacharla Chithambara Swami on 22-7-1997. We collected some information from the priest Umamaheswarlu and that very evening had darshan of Tikka Rangayya Swami's samadhi. At the samadhi we found his majestic figure in the form of an image and also his padukas.

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20. NEELAKANTHA SATCHIDANADA GHANENDRA (1788-1907)

The Formless Supreme One appears in the form of the guru. He opens the blinded eyes of the disciples with the collyrium of knowledge. Those who lead their lives with this supreme knowledge stand to gain anything here and hereafter. Among such gurus Sri Neelakantha Satchidananda Ghanendra is one. He was born in Karnataka, travelled all over the country visiting celebrated yogic kshetras and became an adept in all yogic paths. He imparted the knowledge of yoga to seekers all over the country and passed away a celebrated yogi in Hyderabad. But we have very few details about his life.

In the Sultan Bazaar area of Hyderabad, behind Badi Chawdi, there is a lane by name Moti Singh. Sri Neelankantha Satchidananda Swami's Math is to be found in that lane opposite to the residence of Syamapant Gopala Rao the then Customs Commissioner. It is briefly called the Satchidananda Math. In the basement we have the Mandir of Sita Ramachandra, and besides that the samadhi of the Swami. Behind we find the yajna arena, and by side, kitchen, storeroom quarters for the priest, bathrooms, etc. On the upper portion of the main building, are situated three big halls, and three small rooms. Devotees attending the special function, coming from outside> stay in these halls. Their children who come to the city for studies stay in those halls.

When I was a student in the B.A. class (1947-1949), I stayed in a room on the upper portion. Since children from the families of devotees - Sarvadevabhtla, Madiraju and Kaluvala from Khammam district-were my classmates, I was able to get accommodation in the Math. We cooked in a small room and lived in the spacious hall. At the time of any function in the Math, our kitchen was closed and we used to get a sumptuous feast in the Math. Scholars and worshippers following the tradition of Srividya used to stay with us. One such scholar was Karra Agganna

Sastri who Wrote a commentary on Kalidasa's Srividya text called *Chidgaganachandrika*. This commentary is called "*Divya Chakori*". Among other scholars who used to visit the Math were Adluri Sitaramasastry, Veleti Raghava Sastri; Sivappa Chayanulu. The yajnas were performed under the supervision of Nookala Satyanarayana Srauti.

It is sad that even when we stayed in that Math, with the samadhi of a celebrated yogi, we failed to recognize his eminence. We were like a frog beside a lotus. When I study the Swami's life now, I realise what an invaluable opportunity I lost and feel extremely sad. However, I console myself that I have now at least the great privilege of writing about the Swami.

Danamasa was a village in the Chikkamagalur taluk of the then Mysore state. In that village lived the pious couple Lingamba and Mallaparya. They were Smartha Brahmins, following the Vedic traditions and filled with piety and devotion. They had a son Sankara Narayana whose wife was Tungamma. Their son was Gopala Pandit. His wife, Bhagirathi, was the daughter of Appanna Deekhita. They were highly virtuous people filled with the sterling qualities of Brahmin tradition. Gopala Pandita and Bhagirathi were a devoted couple and were blessed with all the virtues of a couple devoted to the values of the brahminical tradition. Like Kapila born to Devahuti and Kardama, Dattatreya to Atri and Anasuya, a son was born to Gopala Pandita and Bhagirathi in the Hindu calendar year Keelaka, on Saturday, Ashadha Bahula Sashthi (1788 AD). The child was named in the beginning as Nanjundayya. He later on took the name of Sri Neelakantha Satchidananda Ghanendra Natha. Nanjundayya was initiated into studies in the Karthik month of Paridhavi year (1792). He was five years old and by his twelfth year Nanjundayya achieved unparalleled reputation as a great scholar.

It is a truism that the omniscient guru himself comes seeking when the sishya is ready. At that time there was a famous yogi by name Sri Ramananda Ghanendra. He travelled all over the country and moulded many into supreme jnanis. Nanjundayya appeared to his divine vision as

an extremely gifted seeker. The Ramananda guru tradition is a very eminent one. Adinatha's disciple was Sivananda and his disciple was Matsyendranath, also known as Mahaprakasanandanath. His disciple was Gorkhnath (also known as Maheswaranandanath) whose disciple was Sambhavanandanath whose disciple was Mrigesanandanath and his disciple Kumkumanandanath. Desikanandanath was Kumkumanandanath's disciple. Ramanandaghanendranath was the disciple of this Desikanandanath. And Ramananda was Nilakantha Sachidananda's guru. His disciple was Trayambaka Bala Chintamani. He was the pontiff of Gauripuram Chintamani Peetha.

Sri Ramananda came to Danamasa village and sought out Gopal Pandit's house. Neither he nor his son Nanjundayya was at home. Sri Ramananda folded a small piece of paper, gave it to Bhagirathi and asked her to give to her son. He then vanished. As soon as Nanjundayya came, his mother gave the folded paper to him, saying that an anonymous yogi had arrived and wanted it to be handed over to him. Nanjundayya opened the note and instantly his heart was illumined and a luminous glow filled it. A spirit of intense renunciation took hold of his heart. Taking the permission of his parents, Nanjundayya started in search of Sri Ramananda. He searched everywhere and eventually coming to know that the great sage was in the Chamundeswari Hill cave, courageously entered the cave. He walked for some distance in that cave. He saw a Yogi sitting in the posture of intense meditation. He did prostration to him and stood patiently. After some time the Yogi opened his eyes, and making enquiries about his antecedents asked him with what intention he came to see him. "I wish to do service to you and that will make me feel blessed!" said Nanjundayya. The Yogi felt highly pleased and accepted him as his disciple. Nanjundayya stayed with his guru for some years and became an adept in all the yogic practices his guru taught him.

One day Sri Ramananda called Nanjundayya and said: "I taught all the things I know. From now on you will be known as Satchidananda. The first thing I want you to do is to return to your parents, make them happy and only after obtaining their permission, go wherever you want.

You achieve perfection in all the methods I taught you. But never forget the welfare of others, compassion to all living beings and uplift of the downtrodden people.” He then blessed him and Nanjundayya returned to his village. He was now aglow with the splendour of a new name and the various spiritual disciplines he practiced. His parents were immensely pleased to see him and he told his parents all that had happened after he left them. Their delight knew no bounds. They felt pleased that such a worthy son had taken birth in their house. After serving his parents for sometime, Nanjundayya left for Srisailam with their permission. He had darshan of Siva and Bhramaramba, the presiding deities of Srisailam and entered a cave near Patalanganga. There he practiced yoga and did intense tapas. He attained complete perfection in pooma hathayoga. He was blessed with the eight occult powers. After some time he left Srisailam and visited all the yogic kshetras situated in the country from the Himalayas to Kanyakumari. To those who sought his guidance he gave instruction in various methods of sadhana.

Satchidananda spent 60 years of yoga life in this way and came to Hyderabad, the capital city of the Nizam in 1876, (Dhatru year) He was 88 years old. He stayed incognito in Kandaswami choultry. Raja Kandaswami was a minister in the Nizam’s council of ministers. Raja Kishan Prasad Bahadur was the Chief Minister. (Even today Kandaswami choultry and garden exist. There was a gymnasium - Hanuman Vyayamshala - by the side of the middle of the garden. I used to go to the Vyayamshala regularly. Kandaswami’s brother was Armugam, and his son was Sivasankar, his son Viraswami. The latter’s eldest son, Ananda Rao Mudaliar was my classmate. He retired as Commission in the Religious Endowments department of the government) In the very beginning of the Kandaswami street is situated the Kandaswami market. It is there even now. Opposite to that is the Moti Singh lane. A devotee by name Sammeta Krishnayya Naidu used to stay there. He was attracted by Satchidananda and served him with great devotion. The Swami felt happy by his service and gave him mantra deeksha. Since Naidu was very young, the Swami blessed him specially so that he would

not fall a prey to the temptations the youth are subject to. After some days, the Swami left Hyderabad for an unknown destination. However, he used to return once year which made him well-known. Disregarding distinctions of caste, color and creed, he turned Hindu, Muslims and Yavanas towards the spiritual path. And according to their aptitude and religion, he initiated them into Hatha, Laya, Lambika, and Rajayoga mantras. In this way, the Swami used to travel to different areas in the country but return to Hyderabad without fail. We do not know in which place he blessed whom. The Swami was known as Neelakanthayya in the Srisailam region, Vasudevasutra Pandit in the Nagpur area, Thakur Baba in Assam and Viswanathayya in and around Nirmal and Melkote areas. And, in the Nizam state, he was known as Satchidananda Swami.

In the Pramadi year (1879) the Swami visited the Krishna district. In Lingagudem village of Nandigama Taluk, a noble Brahmin by name Sadhu Parabrahmayya, lived. He never accepted food and water from others and did severe penance and performed the five yajnas such as Sahasra Gayatri and Panchasahasra Panchakshari. But he was doubtful whether all the things he did were acceptable to Parameshwara. It was in that predicament, that Satchidananda demonstrated and proved that all his modes of sadhana were accepted by the Supreme Being. Parabrahmayya took initiation from Satchidananda and after some time gave up the householder's life, reached Srisailam and doing intense tapas, achieved, siddhi there itself. In 1882 (Chitrabhanu year) the Swami performed the Sarada Navaratri Festival in Muttagudem near Khammam and later left for north India. When the Swami was travelling in Kamakhya in Assam, there was a great sage by name Vishnukantha Gosai who became friendly with the Swami. The Gosai was always surrounded by 500 disciples.

Both the yogis did tapas for some time on the coast of the Brahmaputra river. The Gosai realised that the Swami was a great adept in mantra yoga. He then became the Swami's disciple and not only learnt the secrets of yoga, but also got his own disciples initiated by the Swami. In 1885 the Swami did tapas in Vallabhapura, on the coast of Thungabhadra river, for some time. He stayed in the temple there. He made the devotees

realize the essence of jnanayoga. The Swami's fame spread far and wide. Our Swami was a great adept in the Srividya devotional tradition, and was blessed by the realization of Sridevi. In 1887 (Srvajit year) and 1888 (Sarvadhari year) the Swami performed the Navaratri festivals in Jaggayyapet and Secunderabad, respectively.

Satchidananda Swami had a strong physical frame. Even when he was quite advanced in age - no wrinkles were to be found on his body. In 1879, when the Swami was in Hyderabad, a yogi by name Krishnanand had his darshan. Krishnananda earlier met the Swami in Srisailam where the Swami was seen undertaking severe tapas. Both were then 30 years of age. Krishnananda praised the Swami that he was, now at the age of 90, as strong as he was when he had seen him at 30 years age. In 1882 when Sarada Navaratri festival was held in the house of Dattatreya Krishnaji in Gadag, an old Vaishya gentleman seeing the Swami, said that the Swami appeared the same as when he saw him when he (the Vaishya) was 12 years old. This is a proof of the mysterious power of yoga and tapas. In the year 1880 (Vikrama year), the Swami was in Nagpur with some devotees. There was a devotee at Nagpur by name Kotharu Narayanaswami Naidu. In those days it took 3 days to travel from Hyderabad to Nagpur. But the Swami, travelling on the ticket sent by Naidu, reached Nagpur the very next day. This is an evidence of the occult powers of travel which the Swami had.

In the year 1890 (Vikriti year) the Swami performed the Sarannavaratri Pooja in Narayana Devarakere and reached Gouripura near the Virupaksha Kshetra in the month of Kartik. In that place, there was Chintamani peetha which was the center for Mother Rajarajeswari. It was also a very ancient center. The devotees there felt that no one was better qualified in every way to occupy the peetha than the Swami and anointed him the head with appropriate ceremonies. From that time onwards, the Swami was known with the deeksha name of Sri Satchidananda Neelakantha Sadananda Chintamani. The name which, however, became popular was "Gouripuram Swami". Gouripura was a small orthodox village. It is situated on the road which leads to the Hadagali

Taluk Kendra. By its side there was a stream which over flows for 7 to 8 months in a year. Though, it is a small village, Gouripura is extremely beautiful with green trees, fresh air and innocent villagers. Since it was on the highway for travellers in their itenary, to be of service to them, the Swami got a choultry built for them and made arrangements for their food and necessaiy rest. But the Swami disliked being saddled with the affair of the Math. But because of the compulsion of the villagers, devotees, Pandits and elders of the village, he was compelled to stay there. Many devotees, patients, issueless persons, farmers in dire distress and seekers used to come to the Swami. They were consoled by the Swami and listening to his words used to go back, their minds filled with peace. The Swami was the head of the Chintamani Math for a long time. During the period also, he used to visit Hyderabad regularly. He got rid of the burden of the headship of the Math by handing it over to his disciple Tirumalaraya, whom he gave the new name of Trayambaka Chintamani. Tirumalaraya was a devout, soft - sattvic - disciple with sterling qualities of mind and heart and, above all, deeply dedicated to his guru. The Swami told his disciples to serve the new pontiff with the same dedication that they showed to himself.

The Swami performed the Sarannavaratri Pooja in 1907 (Plavanga, year) and that was the last Pooja he held at the Chintamani Peetha in Gouripura. He then came to Hyderabad and the visit made the disciples immensely happy. The Swami knew the past present and future and possessed other occult powers which, of course, he never made use of for his own selfish ends, like Rishabha. On 30.11.1907, Saturday, (Plavanga year and Kartik month and Bahula Dasami) he passed away. The cremation was done, duly following the related religious norms, in the large compound adjacent to the house of Krishnaya Naidu in Moti Singh street. Later an edifice at the cremation place, a Ram temple and a big Math were built there. At the time of his passing away, the Swami was 119 years and 4 months old.

A small book which contains information about the Swami's life written by Kokkireni Narasimha Rao and others was published. This

was published in 1946 by the first disciple of the Swami, Sammeta Krishnayya Naidu who also built the Math and choultry. The Swami's brief life is to be found in the first few pages. The rest of the book consists of the poems in praise of the Swami written by disciples in both Telugu and Sanskrit. At the end we find a chapter called "Tattva Bodha" written by Paramahansa Parivarajakachary Sri Vasudeva.

The picture of the Swami found on the Samadhi and in the book are similar. It shows a very majestic figure with a broad forehead, adorned with vibhuti lines, and kumkum bindi. He had a strong body and he wore pendants on the ears and a garland of rudraksha beads round his neck and also a ring. Perhaps, this must be the one done after his ascending the peetham.

I shall cite one instance which illustrates the Swami's greatness. Sri M. Rangacharya, a former President of the All-India Sai Samaj, a man of ripe old years and a worshipper of Lord Dattatreya used to stay, during the first phase of the 20th century, in Moti Singh street where the Satchidanand Math was situated. He used to have darshan of the saints, sages and yogis visiting the Math. The Acharya was working, at that time as inspector of the European schools run by the Nizam. He was then an employee of the Nizam government. There was also at that time, a great Yogi alive, by name Sambhunath Maharaj. He used to do tapas living in the borders of Tibet. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, was the cousin Brother of this Yogi. The Yogi worked for some time in government service and then resigned and took to the spiritual path and was known as a great Himalayan Yogi. In 1936, this Yogi visited the Swami's samadhi and touched with great reverence the Swami's Kamandalu and Paduka to his eyes. Since the car couldn't enter the narrow lane, the Yogi and Kishan Prasad went walking to the Math and left the car in front of the lane. One Syamapanthula Gopal Rao was among the crowd which gathered around the Yogi. He brought his son who was deaf and dumb and implored the Yogi to bless the child which meant asking him to cure him. The yogi turned a deaf ear to Gopal Rao's entreaties. When Raja Kishan Prasad also pleaded, the yogi relented

and writing the sacred syllable 'om' on the child's tongue for thirty times, uttered it loudly as many times. The child too uttered the sacred syllable 'om'. The people who gathered there surrounded the Yogi with respect and reverence. Among those people Sriman Rangacharya was one. Unable to withstand the pressure of the crowd, the Yogi simply disappeared. The stunned Raja Krishna Prasad went back to his car and there, to his great surprise, he found the Swami seated in the car. Both of them left behind the crowd and drove away. One can imagine the supreme eminence of the Swami by the fact that a Yogi of such a stature visited his samadhi. The next day Rangacharya had darshan of the Yogi in the house of Krishna Prasad. After two years, he had his darshan again on a hillock near Hampi. We find the picture of this great Yogi-Sri Sambhunath Maharaj and some other sages and saints in the mandir of Satchidananda's samadhi.

To the day, festivals such as Sarannavaratri in the month of Aswija, Sri Rama Kalyana in the month of Chaitra and Swami's annual Aradhana in the month of Kartika are performed with due ceremony in Satchidananda Math. Sammeta Krishnayya Naidu was the first trustee of the Math. His son Guru Prasada Naidu became the next trustee. At present, Venkata Krishnayya, Naidu, Guru Prasada Naidu's son is the trustee.

Sources:

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21. MACHILIPATNAM DONTULAMMA (1807-1932)

Like the birth of a stream and the birth of a hero, the birth of a yogi is marked by humble beginnings but tremendous growth and change later. Dontulamma, one such yogini, was born on the banks of Narmada river but later moved to the banks of Krishna river. She distributed the purity of those two rivers to devotees who took refuge in her and to people at large. We do not have for certain details of her native place, her name, her birth and her martial life. We have only the views of contemporaries, the words she artlessly spoke to them, the opinions of those who served her to rely upon as sources of her life history. Dontulamma lived for 65 years in Machili Bandar (Machilipatnam, now) and passed away in 1932. Valiveti Perayya recognized her as a sixty-year old elderly person by the time she arrived in Machilipatnam. Therefore, we can infer that she was born around 1807 AD. In northern India, women carry water on their head placing one clay pot on top of another. Since this yogini in the early days after her arrival in Machilipatnam carried water in this manner on her head, she was called Dontulamma, ("Dontulu" means in Telugu pots arranged one on the other vertically) since she used to carry water pots on her head in Bandar for some time after her arrival there. Since she 'answered in the affirmative to a question put by a resident of Gudur whether she was the wife of one Surya Nayak living on the bank of the river Narmada, and since she used to call Subbamma often as Papti, and in the light of some other actions and gestures, the people there called her Dontulamma and arrived at the conclusion that she was a Banjara-Lambadi woman. In the history of Andhra, Machilipatnam has a very significant place. Until the first half of the 20th century, it was our educational and cultural center. It was Dontulamma who brought spiritual glory to this place.

We do not have any details of this yogini's life for the first 60 years, on the banks of river Narmada. She was the wife of Surya Nayak Banjara and gave birth to some children. One day when she was carrying food

for her husband working in the fields, a yogi appeared and told her: "From now on you should give up the ties of the world and devote yourself to the spiritual quest. Go and get your husband's permission." She then got her sister married to her husband and, obtaining his permission, she came back to the presence of that great sage. He gave her initiation. It is said that later she travelled through many pilgrim centers, forests, villages and after spending some time in Srisailam, came to Bandar and settled down there. After some time she was transformed into an Avadhuta and used to roam naked in the streets, eating whatever was given, but always in a state of intense absorption. She used to sleep on the ground, with the bundle of tom clothes as her pillow. She stayed initially in the lane where potters lived. Then she went and stayed near the kiln of one Thumma Moolaswami in the Jagannathapuram area. Thumma Moolaswami ignored her, at first, as a naked, mad woman. One day an ornament round the neck of a young woman fell off and dropped into the hands of Dontulamma. She tucked it away in the bundle of her tom clothes and said that she would hand it over to the owners when they came. But Moolaswami demanded that it should be given to him. Dontulamma refused. Filled with anger, Moolaswami raised his hand holding a stick to beat her. But the hand got immobilised in that very posture. He then realised that Dontulamma was a yogini with great siddhis, powers, and fell at her feet craving her forgiveness. Dontulamma forgave him and from that day onwards Moolaswami's smithy was Dontulamma's living space. Amma (Dontulamma) gave back the ornament to the Yadava girl. One night Dontulamma was resting on the pyal of a criminal lawyer's house and absorbed in an intense meditative state. The lawyer happened to come out and seeing the naked yogini got furious and kicked the bundle of clothes which Dontulamma kept as her pillow. It fell at a distance. Dontulamma smiled and went her way. But the foot which kicked the bundle developed burning pain and he died after some time.

Three cloth merchants belonging to Challapalli recognised Dontulamma as a great yogini with powerful occult faculties. They came for business to Machilipatnam and rested one night on the pyals of a house situated

besides the road which led to Vijayawada. Dontulamma was sleeping there on one side with her “pillow” of tom clothes. She got up in the middle of the night. The merchants were curious to see what this mad woman would do. They saw a wonderful scene: even as they were seeing, a powerful light, like a flash of lightning emerged from her eyes. The three were overwhelmed with faith and devotion as well as fear. Seeing that they were afraid to approach her, Dontulamma herself approached them and gave them a dazzling, intensely loving smile. She then took out a handful of chilly paste and gave it to them to eat. They received it as holy prasad and put it in their mouths. And wonder of wonders the chilly paste tasted deliciously sweet. They were stunned into surprise and fell at Dontulamma’s feet. The entire night they spent looking at her to their heart’s content. When they started to go back to Challapalli, in the morning, Dontulamma gestured to them to see her whenever they happened to visit Bandar. Ever since that day, they used to come for Amma’s darshan every week and blessed by her became great Jnanis. As a result of these rich merchants, Dontulamma’s fame spread far and wide in the villages around Bandar and Chai lap 1 li.

Valiveti Perayya who came from Mangalagiri and settled in Bandar was the first devotee who recognised the unique taste and power of Amma’s prasad. Dontulamma used to keep hidden in her old quilt a paste of onions, salt and chillys mixed together. She used to give it as prasad to her devotees; The prasad she gave to Perayya had indescribable taste. Perayya who tasted that eventually tasted the delicious taste of self- realisation. Sundry shop owners were eager that Dontulamma should visit their shops and take something or the other. They knew that this ensured a bumper sale that day. If she came and took a sheaf of tobacco or a fruit, they knew that their sales could be phenomenal. The day Amma didn’t take anything was a profitless day. Knowing that her touch had that kind of power, traders used to stand in long queues.

Chodavarapu Subbamma was a widow living in Circlepet area and eked out a living by making gold ornaments. Her stepson, as Dontulamma predicted, died and the widow stricken with unbearable grief ran to the

mother. She was amazed to see Dontulamma sitting on mandragabalu (large black scorpions). Having already seen Dontulamma's amazing powers, Subbamma realised that Amma was testing her. She surrendered to her and asked her to show the way out of her grief. Dontulamma taught her the need for renunciation-vairagya-and asked her to leave her place and stay with her. Subbamma did as commanded by Mother. Mother tested her for a year and directed Vemuri Acchayya Havaladar to give her initiation, deeksha. Subbamma served Dontulamma all her life and thereby felt blessed. Dontulamma extended the life of Subbamma, who was serving her with intense devotion by two years and ultimately absorbed her into her own cosmic consciousness, after her death.

Amma rectified the mistakes of her devotees and blessed them with mental peace, by her spiritual power. For instance, there was the case of the child of the advocate by name Kudakala Rajendra Rao. His child refused to drink the mother's milk right from its birth and was about to die. Dontulamma took the child in her lap and breast-fed him herself. The child came alive. The grateful advocate offered to give oil for the worship of Amma in the mandir. Dontulamma never gave deeksha, initiation, without thoroughly examining the aspirant's nature and character. When an aspirant came for initiation, Mother asked him to come to the cemetery at 2 'o clock in the night. Accordingly he went. Even as he was seeing Dontulamma, she got transformed into a ferocious tiger. The aspirant was terror-stricken and ran away. This incident was narrated by Bhavanula Alvaramma. Ch.Padmanabha Prasad was stricken by paralysis which affected his right leg. Mother tied Prasad's leg to her own leg with an old cloth and kept it like that for some time. Then when she removed the cloth which tied both legs together, Prasad's leg was completely healed and became normal. Prasad's wife Lakshmi Devi used to come daily along with her daughter and have darshan of Dontulamma. Mother used to call their daughter "Rani" (or Queen). Her parents were desirous of getting her married to Yarlagadda Sivarama Prasad, the Prince of Challapalli. But the Prince was not in favour of this. The parents were sad that the Mother's words didn't come true. Dontulamma, whose

words always came true consoled them and gave her assurance. Next morning the Raja of Muktyala adopted that child ("Rani") and later got her married to the Prince of Muktaysa. Dontulamma was honored in a grand manner in the princely precincts - the palace - of Challapalli Raja.

Many devotees and seekers after spiritual realization surrendered to Mother Dontulamma and achieved their aim by her blessings and grace. There was one Karumuri Krishnamurti who had some literary gifts. He was the disciple of a mahatma called Yejandla Appadasu. He surrendered to Mother Dontulamma for initiation into the "great mantra". Dontulamma initiated him with a mantra and made him pray to the guru. Instantly, an excellent poetic composition issued from his lips, assuming the form of a prayer. Krishnamurti was a great sadhaka who did incredibly stupendous tapas and, what is more, he did number of rituals for pacifying the elements. Indeed, he used to sprinkle 5 mounds of sugar for ants alone. He was a devotee of Dontulamma's inner circle and performed many good works initiated by Dontulamma. There was another great man called Veerabhadracharya who was a student of Noble College who served Dontulamma and another Avadhuta by name Rangavadhuta. It is this Veerabhadracharya who later became known as Tattvanandaswami (1881-1952).

Babu Mastan and Pandurangadas (both natives of Bandar) received Mother's grace abundantly. Mastan used to have spiritual discussions with Dontulamma at midnight. Pandurangadas composed several hymns in praise of Dontulamma. One such had a captivating line: "At the smithy of Moolaswami there is Muktikanta, The lady of Liberation." There was also Jonnavittula Seshagiri Rao, (1905-1937), the famous singer who used to learn music under the celebrated guru Hari Nagabhushanam (1884-1959), belonging to Bandar. He used to abscond from his classes quite often and used to serve Dontulamma. This the guru did not like and scolded him severely. Mother declared that henceforth Seshagiri Rao need not go to his guru and blessed him. Seshagiri Rao blossomed into a great singer and a great scholar of music. There was also Kanukollu Trivikrama Rao (1878-1950) who was a great sage. After taking sanyas,

he became the pontiff of Siddheswari Peetham of Kurtalam. In 1910, he became acquainted with Dontulamma. He sought to receive initiation from Mother and in the middle of the night went to her and said, "Mother, I feel hungry! Shall I leave?" Dontulamma broke her silence and said: "Why are you in a hurry? You have delicious food here. See this ... see alertly, carefully ..." So saying she tore off a sheaf of tobacco. The sage prostrated before her and left. This incident is mentioned in his life history. Repalle Chinnamma (1857-1956) was another great yogini. Along with another yogini, by name Peddamma she had darshan of Dontulamma in 1915, and got her doubts cleared.

Bandaru Dontullamma's history was written by Panguluri Veera Raghavudu who also wrote histories of Andhra yogis and devotees. Lacking mental peace, he went to Dontulamma and sought her blessings. By merely her glance, she initiated him and blessed him with a tranquil, peaceful mind. Panguluri held the view that since her mind was imbued with the power of Atman, she always stayed in a state of continuous Samadhi. Since she was in a state of total, un-interrupted absorption in Parabrahman. She was in a state of samadhi in spite of mental modifications. This was the view expressed by Veeraraghavudu. He compared Dontulamma as on a par with the incarnations of Rama and Krishna. Day and night Dontulamma was in a state of contemplative samadhi of the Atman. Contemporaries who were acquainted with her greatness and her occult powers included Subbamma, Krishnamurti, Lakshamma, Yadavalli Nagaeswara Rao, Krovi Stayanarayana, Daliparti Picchihari, Koka Ahobalarao, Kanukollu Trivikrama Rama Rao. They all belong to Bandar. Mutyala Narasamma belonged to Nellore. They all received Dontulamma's grace.

During the last five years of her life Dontulamma's legs gave way and in the final year of her life she was totally bedridden. Young and old, men and women, of all castes and classes and stations in life came and **had** her darshan. They placed fruits and flowers at her feet. By mere darshan, their desires were fulfilled. Dontulamma gave up her body on 9.2.1932 at 11.30 in the night. (This was Prajotpatti year, Tuesday,

Maghashuddha Thadiya). After her samadhi her devotees acquired a piece of land to build a Math and a mandir in her memory. Among those who developed the mandir, etc., were Nandigama Kotayya Das of Ganchenapalli, Gudavarru Sri Devi, and Annapooma Ahobala Rao, Tyagaraju and Gopalgiri of Chitoor. Annual celebrations for 11 days are held uninterruptedly to this day. Devotees from far off places reach the place and donate liberally for the celebrations and receive the blessings of Amma. The image of Amma, clad in traditional lambadi clothes appears extremely beautiful and radiant. In a corner is kept a pile of pots. This is to remind modem devotees. Like Shirdi Sai Baba, Dontulamma responds, even from her samadhi to the prayers of devotees and fulfills their desires. She wipes away the tears of the afflicted. She appears in dreams and gives spiritual instruction. She steers the boats of their lives safely. We visited Dontulamma's samadhi mandir on 7-5-1995. We found the picture of her disciple Balia Subbanaganna also in the mandir below Dontulamma's picture.

Sources :

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22. ADONI TIKKA LAKSHMAMMA (1815-1933)

A mad woman for those who do not know, an Avadhuta for those who know, a celestial tree that fulfils all that devotees desires; protector of the afflicted, a mine of miracles for the seekers, a jeevanmukta (one who is liberated while alive) for the jnanis. This sums up Tikka Lakshamma. She received acclaim while living and worship after leaving the physical frame from the people of both Karnataka and Andhra. The place where her samadhi stands in Adoni in Kurnool district is a holy place of pilgrimage for devotees.

A pious couple by name Madiga Mangamma and Bandeppa lived in Musanupalle village in the beginning of the 19th century. They were simple, hardworking villagers. Their very nature was to respect the elderly and look after the young with affection. They practiced Karma yoga doing their duty without craving after the result. They were blessed by God to live with contentment, doing their traditional jobs and satisfied with whatever earnings they got. After the birth of three sons, they were blessed with three daughters. The first girl, born in 1815 is Lakshamma. Bandeppa, her father, was a man of sterling character. Though his hands were occupied with hard work, his heart was engaged with the spiritual quest for self-realization. His tongue was occupied in singing hymns. Lakshamma absorbed the spirit of the hymns her father sang with great devotion and faith. She did not have the usual pastimes of children of her age and was not inclined to play even with her brothers and sisters. She used to roam as she liked, singing the songs she heard her father sing and disregarded even eating. She used to whisper to herself. Seeing this strange behaviour, her parents were greatly worried.

When the elders in the village suggested that to get rid of her strange behaviour she should be married off, the couple performed her marriage, finding a suitable groom in the Siruguppa village. But it was a compulsion for Lakshamma which did no good to her. Both her own home and her in-

laws home proved the same to her. Not only did she not have any idea or awareness of her marital life, she also used to sit in a corner of the house and mumble to herself we do not know what. Looking at her strange behaviour, the in-laws consulted some shamans and even the physicians. They went and offered worship to all the gods and goddesses. But all their efforts failed. Even when her mother-in-law or father-in-law or even her husband, seeing her mad actions, beat her she never retaliated but kept absolutely quiet. She suffered the torture patiently and silently. Her silence was her protective mantra. If she was given food she ate. On her own she never asked. At that young age, Lakshamma appeared to have transcended the dualities of life like good and bad, joy and sorrow, and gave the impression that she had lost something tremendously valuable, and that, with one pointed concentration, was attempting to regain it. And since that thing was not seen, she gave the impression that she remained in silence. Even the soothsayers confirmed this impression. The final goal, our scriptures say is to go back to where we came from. But the majority of the people forgetting that goal think that whatever goal they are seeking is the real, final goal. The in-laws and her husband gave up their attempts to redeem her and remained indifferent for some time. After some more time, they totally neglected her. Their neglect was God-sent to Lakshamma. Their indifference conferred freedom on her. Declaring that he cannot possibly lead a normal family life with such a woman, the husband disowned her. Bandeppa came running and tried desperately to save the marriage but in vain. Lakshamma was now free from any duty to her husband. This was the foundation for her sadhana, her spiritual quest. She left her parents family and her own family behind and reached Adoni. She was twenty years old.

Adoni town was a new place to Lakshamma. There was no one to restrain or regulate her life. Lanes, bylanes, drains, dung heaps, garbage dumps, dried up wells - she used to roam wherever, she liked murmuring or singing to herself, indifferent to food or sleep, rain or shine. She lost all awareness of or pride in the body. If some kind-hearted mothers gave her food, she ate. If miscreants and mischievous boys tortured her, she

used to bear it. Even when worms or insects made inroads into her body and tortured her, she didn't remove them. Her mind was filled with detachment, and she lost awareness of the body. The entire universe was her dwelling place. The earth was her cot, the sky was the canopy, the moon and the stars were the lights, rain was her bath, the wind was her fan, and the sun provided warmth and light. One day a great Mahatma encountered Lakshmamma who by this time showed and absorbed all the qualities of an Avadhuta. He made her sit under the shade of a tree and initiated her, placing his hand on her head. It is said that instantly Lakshmamma attained the state of samadhi. It was obvious that however great inherently one is one requires a guru. Lakshmamma got what she was seeking for a long time. She used to be in samadhi for hours, indeed days, together, continuously. After the state of samadh broke, she used to roam in the streets, chewing a sheaf of tobacco or something like that. Since her behaviour was bizarre and eccentric (tikka in Telugu) people used to call her eccentric-Tikka-Lakshmamma. The name stuck to her. Knowledgeable people called her as an Avadhuta, a Siddha Purusha. Though these were few, they had great faith in and devotion to Lakshmamma. They served her in whatever way they could. She was hailed as a jnani, omniscient and capable of doing anything by many in Adoni town. Some incidents happened which illustrate her miraculous powers.

One day a prostitute was going to perform dance at the function and decorating herself fully started to go there. On the way she encountered Lakshmamma who tore her choli (bodice), abused her and pushed her away. Those who didn't know who Lakshmamma was abused her. Those who knew her powers and her nature suspected that something terrible was going to happen. Though the prostitute performed singing and dancing according to her traditional profession, she was married to a person. Within no time, they got the news that her husband died. Thus Lakshmamma's strange behavior with this Vesya showed her precognitive powers to predict the future.

In another incident, Lakshamma punished a person who behaved rudely with her. On the morning of Vijaya Dasami day, once, the wife of a very rich man came out from her house. Suddenly Lakshamma appeared from nowhere, caught hold of that lady and snatched away the necklace. The lady was filled with dread and running back to her house, told about the incident to her people. The householder ordered that Lakshamma should be suitably punished and sent his servant. The servant beat Lakshamma mercilessly and dragging her by her hair, pushed her to the ground. Blood started gushing forth from Lakshamma's body and her face. Lakshamma looked at the servant and cursed: "May your home be destroyed!" and went on her way. The servant's wife and children died and the rich lady's husband too died.

There was heavy rain, once, in the rainy season. Lakshamma was stuck deep in a canal. Devotees who were waiting for her darshan searched everywhere but couldn't locate her. On the third day, they found Lakshamma sunk in a canal lying like a corpse. They gathered around her and began weeping that she was no more. Lakshamma opened her eyes and looking around smiled. People realised that even when lying for three days in a wayside canal, in a state of samadhi, nothing had happened to her. They found that she was gifted with extraordinary powers. On the left side of the present Math built for Mother, there used to be a dustbin. Day and night Mother used to lie there. One day a police sub-inspector who came there on his routine duty of inspection found the body of Lakshamma dismembered with the head, legs and hands lying scattered around. He concluded that Mother was murdered. He went back to the police station and sent his staff to do the needful. But when the police came, they found Lakshamma sitting serenely near the dust bin. They were stunned and went back to report the strange thing. The sub-inspector came running and surprised beyond belief, prostrated to the Mother. He realised that Amma performed the yoga of Dismembering the Body. Soon after, he was promoted to a higher official position. The grace of Amma fell on this man at the right and ripe time.

Amma's fame as a great yogini with miraculous powers spread beyond

Adoni and devotees in thousands rushed to have her darshan in Adoni. They were from all castes and classes and with varied natures and some others were evil-natured and vicious. Since Amma was omniscient, she used to reveal the nature of everyone, who approached her, frankly and fearlessly. She used to threaten and often beat evil-minded people. Such people were afraid to come anywhere near her. Guiltless people, the poor and the destitute fearlessly approached her and received her blessings. They realised that if Amma accepted their offerings something good will happen and if she refused, some punishment was on its way. The persons who tortured her in the early days of her coming to Adoni fell victims to cholera which raged at that time. Those who worshipped Amma survived. Though everyone ran away from the town when cholera broke out, Amma herself remained. She used to sit on a pyal near the dustbin. When the town was hit by drought, the ryots decorated Amma in the traditional way of a goddess and took her out in a procession. Rains were sure to follow.

Since Amma had occult powers such as clairvoyance, clairsaudience, knowledge of the future and others, she used to shout loudly at people who passed her by. When she shouted, "Oh God! You are stricken with difficulties! But don't worry! They will all disappear!" Those who were caught up in legal squabbles used to win in those cases. One day Amma looked at a man and shouted loudly, "If you go now, she will come back with you!" This person's wife ran away to her parent's home, forsaking him. Though many people went and pleaded with her, she refused to return. But after hearing Amma's words, the husband went to his in-laws place and wonder of wonders the wife returned with her husband without any grudges.

Similarly, when Amma said, "That is the lane, go fast!" the paramours seeking prostitutes going into the lane secretly, used to walk fast, hanging their heads in shame. Amma also told parents which alliance will come through and which will not. When a person who was planning to marry for the third time, went to Amma, she said: "Alas! the girl has to cry and suffer!" Within five months after the marriage, that husband

died. When Amma had to reveal something inauspicious, she didn't tell it directly; she used to turn away to another side and tell. Amma quite often used to talk in riddles and puzzles using secret, coded language. This was not understood by all. Amma used to accept food and delicacies from only a select few. She used to take some and give back the rest as her prasad. When it rained, it rained all over except around the place where Lakshmamma stretched herself. Quite often Amma remained in a state of Nirvikalpa Samadhi for three days continuously, totally absorbed in Brahman consciousness.

When the hustle and bustle of people during the day subsided, late in the night, Amma, alone in her solitude, used to sing loudly and melodiously many songs, lyrics, bhajans and become intoxicated. Serving Amma constantly were two women devotees by name Papamma and Hanumakka. Among others who totally dedicated themselves to the service of Amma with incomparable faith and devotion, mention may be made of Rachoti Veeranna, Tumbalam Gutti Lakshmayya, and Balekallu Narasappa. With the blessings of Mother, they achieved happiness, here and hereafter. Among others one can cite Kuridi Manni Ram Singh, Arikeri Sivanna, Washerman Papanna as very important devotees.

On 16-5-1933, between 5 and 6 AM Lakshmamma gave up her body. When it was proposed that she should be cremated in the very place she used to sit, some people belonging to other religions created obstacles. However, Rachoti Ramappa and Thumbalam Lakhmayya put their foot down and with their influence, got her cremated there itself. Her holy body decorated with all paraphernalia was taken out in procession and ceremonially cremated. Later, a Math for Mother was built there. Henceforward annual festivals are held regularly. Every Friday special worship is also done. From 5 'o clock in the morning to 12 'o clock in the evening, Abhisheka, poor feeding, etc., are done regularly. Between 3 'o clock and 7 'o clock during the day, a procession is taken out with the chariot. Anna Prasad is offered to the huge gathering. At present (1998) Rachoti Ramayya is the trustee under whose guidance all celebrations are held.

Besides Adoni, celebrations on a grand scale in honour of Amma are done in Eluburigi in the Raichur district of Karnataka.

Details of Lakshmma's life were collected by Nischintha Sugurarya in his book *Mahaniyula Charitra* in 1923. He passed away in 1924. The book was published in 1968. At that time, it is said she was 80 years old. If we assume that even if he had met Amma in 1923 Amma must have been born in 1843. Vidwan K.M.Karibasava Sastry wrote a Sataka (100 verses) on Mother. To that book, a brief life of Mother written by Mandigiri Arulappa, was appended. The Math published it in 1982. Some details not to be found in Arulappa's brief life, are to be found in the Sataka.

Great Saints like Gollapinni Mallikarjuna Sastiy (1871-1917) and Sadhu Srinivasa Sastri (1892-1958) offered obeysance at her feet.

Sources: -

1. *Mahaniyula Charitra* - N. Sugurarya - 1968.
2. *Tikkalakshmamba Satakam*, K.M.Karibasava Sastri — 1982.

23. CHELLAGURIKI ERRI SWAMI (1822 - 1922)

The sea water becoming ether and assuming the form of a cloud is transformed into rain. It falls on trees, on clay, on pools, on crop, on canal, on Ganga and finally reaches again the sea itself. Likewise every creature who comes from the Supreme Being, after going through various births in different forms finally merges in the Supreme Being itself. After the water from the ocean merges in the ocean, it does not have a separate individuality or identity, or biography as we conceive them. For the Atma who merges in the Supreme Being, the same thing is true. The water in the pool, the flowing water in a canal we can identify and tell about its history. We can identify a tree, a bird, a monkey (Vanara) and a man (nara) and tell their stories. Chellaguriki Erriswami (Erri: a colloquial form of the word Verri which means "eccentric", bordering on "madness") is water which dissolved itself in the ocean, a Self which merged in the Supreme Self. Chellaguriki is a small village in the Bellary district on the Anantapur-Bellary highway. Just as with the arrival of Sai Baba Shirdi became sanctified, so also with the coming of Errithatha (thatha grandpa): Chellaguriki became holy. The earth on which sages, great masters roam becomes sanctified. Like Sai Baba, we do not know where Errithatha was born who his parents were, what his caste and clan was. In the biography Satcharitra, of Shirdi Baba written by Hemad Pant, with Baba's permission we at least have some details of his life after he reached Shirdi. But Errithatha never allowed anyone to write his story. He never told anyone anything even when people asked him persistently. Just as B.V. Narasimha Swami, collected details and wrote Baba's biography, Chandrayya gathered details from devotees and disciples of Erri Swami. Those details were the basis for the biography of this silent saint.

We are told that Errithatha in his premonastic days was called Nanjundayya and he was an (Aradhya) Virasaiva Brahmin. From Telangana he went to Mysore for his education and studying there did a

job as a magistrate or a Deputy Commissioner. But fired by a spirit of intense renunciation he left his wife and children and became an avadhuta. This is one account of his life. We also learn that in the year 1920, to undertake and supervise famine relief, officials from Bellary, Anantapur and Rayadurga went to Chellaguriki for finalizing the details of working out the relief. The official from Rayadurga had heard about Errithatha and went to his Math. He recognised the Saint and talked to him in English. Unusually, Erri Swami who maintained silence, replied in English. The official was surprised not only because the Swami broke his silence to talk to him but also because he spoke in English. The subordinate who came with the official said that the eccentric sage was his classmate, belonged to the Kolar region and worked as deputy Collector. We do not know the reason, the subordinate said, further, the Sage left his home and became like this i.e. an eccentric Sadhu. Then the official from Rayadurga told the Swami that he did not have children who alone can confer good condition for an individual, after death (Sadgati). Erri Swami replied: "Jnana alone is the son. From that only we get sadgati." Before coming to Chellaguriki, Erri Swami visited Kalyanadurga, Belaguppa, Mushturu, Uravakonda, Velugonda, Chikalagurki and other places.

Errithatha spent most of the time diving into the water of wells and tanks and remained submerged. Once when Thatha was coming out swimming in a well, one mischievous Muslim jumped on his back, intentionally to hurt him. Erriswami remained underneath the water for a long time and the mischievous fellow was mortally afraid and started running towards the village. And Errithatha, strangely, appeared in the temple of Basavanna. The miscreant was mortally scared that some calamity will befall him since he had teased a saint. And what he feared happened and he became a despicable person. When the Sage was roaming about in Uravakonda, naughty kids hurled stones at him. He liked to stay in Basavanna temple and Kanyakaparneswari Temple while in Uravakonda. For some days the homes of Thogata Gurram Sanjevamma and Hebbavati Jeejamma were his resting places. Jeejamma was a great devotee. Though she was very poor, within her means, she used to

feed sadhus and sants and felt blessed. Before serving Errithatha she served a great Sadhu by name Alla Swami. Alla Swami told her that a sage much greater than himself will come to her and advised her to serve him and achieve liberation. She did accordingly when she had darshan of Errithatha and felt blessed. Though remaining silent for most of the time, Errithatha used to roam in the streets singing folksongs of a religious nature ecstatically. This detail Jeejamma gave. With the blessings of the Sage, she was able to earn some more money so that she could lead her life without worry. When the parents brought their children who were sick to the Swami for cure, he used to say, "Bring Jaggery. I shall prevent it!" And when the Sage was given some pieces of jaggery, the child was cured and was restored to normal health.

Gattu Mallesappa and others came to know that Errithatha was near a well in Karoor. The Sage was found in the dirty and stinking water of the well. When the persons asked him to come out from that dirty water and come away with them the Sage consented to go with them if they drank that water. With great reluctance they drank it but to their surprise they found it as tasty as milk. Once when Errithatha was in intense meditation in Jambunatha Basavanna temple, five or six thieves came to worship the God in the temple. Not only pious gentlemen but robbers also pray to God. The robbers knew that the Sage had the gift of foretelling they therefore asked whether their "mission" to commit theft will succeed or not. The Sage, immersed in samadhi didn't reply. The thieves were enraged and struck the head of the Sage with a coconut. The coconut broke and the Sage's head bled profusely. Even then the Sage's samadhi state continued. When the robbers went out for theft, some of them were caught. Some fought among themselves about sharing the booty and in the process killed each other. Does doing harm to pious people go without punishment? In the early days of the Sage's stay in Mushturu, he saw the stone image of Nandi and said: "Basavanna! Walk!" Then the stone image became live Basavanna (another name for Nandi) and started walking! Erri Swami didn't speak to anyone and used to sit in the Ramulamma temple. Whatever the devotees offered was enough for

him. There is a stream flowing between Budhagavi and Cheekalagurki. Beside the stream was Dasari's land. Erriswami entered that field and sat silently. When Dasari greeted the Swami, he did not respond. In the meantime, heavy clouds gathered and violent winds started blowing and it started raining. When Dasari implored him to take shelter, Erri Swami did not even move at all. Dasari ran away terrified by the torrential rain. As a result, the stream inundated the area and Dasari thought that the Sage was doubtless washed away, indeed, drowned. But the Sage remained immersed in Sivayoga samadhi. When the rain abated, Dasari went and saw a strange spectacle: the water flowed around the Swami, circling round, so to say. Not a drop touched him. Dasari went to the village and told the villagers about this miraculous incident. A villager, Gururayappa heard about this and got some vada prepared and took them as an offering to the Swami. The Swami smelt them and that was all. He threw them away. Great Sages do not accept offerings from evilminded people. When Errithatha stayed in Kuruvanahalli hills, two devotees-Chennappa gari Lakshamma and Yelagonda Basappa - used to take morning food for the Swami and made him eat it. The Sage gave a piece of jaggery, which somebody offered him, to Basappa. Bappa became prosperous. Siva's wish is the yogi's wish too. Errithatha ate whatever was available and whatever he got. At the time of eating, crows and dogs used to surround him. The Swami used to feed them. And later ate, himself. For the Sage the entire universe and all that existence is filled with the presence of Siva. Everything is the Brahma.

One story holds that Errithatha was a native of Tumkur. Even when he was doing a job as a magistrate he learnt yoga and experienced Nirvikalpa Samadhi. People of that area were of the opinion that he gave up his job, stopped eating and sleeping and practicing yoga and used to sit on the top of a coconut tree. They felt that he was a great yogi who knew the synthesis of Linga and Anga (body). Another version says that Errithatha belonged to Linganaahalli and his name was Nanjundappa. It is said that he served Nagappa, a Lingayat and Nagappa revealed to him all the secrets of yoga. He then told him that he had

nothing more to teach him. If he needed some more, Nagappa said, he should seek Gaganarya of Dodda Ballapura village. Nanjundappa went to Gaganarya and waited patiently. Even after two or three days, Gaganarya did not exchange a word with him. Finally, Gaganarya, deeply moved by Nanjundappa's strength of purpose and devotion told him: "If you seek initiation - upadesa - go round the village completely naked, three times." Nanjundappa did accordingly, effacing the ego totally and transcending body consciousness, and received initiation. Gaganarya gave Nanjundappa, a deeksha name: Niranjana. In those days Gaganarya was engaged in writing a book. On some work he went to another village. Returning he found parts of the palm leaf manuscript eaten away by white ants. Gaganarya felt deeply grieved and went out carrying the grief in his heart. When he returned, he found that Niranjana filled up the portion that was eaten away by the white ants and prepared a complete, new copy. Gaganarya commended the great service that Niranjana did to him. This Gaganaiya went often to the spiritual assemblies held by the Mysore Maharaja, Sri Krishna Rajendra. After some time, he entrusted this responsibility to Niranjana. Once exactly when Niranjana was in Mysore, Gaganarya wished to give up his body and felt sorrowful that his dear disciple was not with him at that hour. He uttered the name "Niranjana! Niranjana!" which expressed his longing to see him at the hour of his passing away. Niranjana who was in Mysore heard his guru's fervent call. The guru gave up his body chanting the name of Siva, in the presence of Niranjana who materialised himself there instantly in response to his guru's call and told him: "The Niranjana who is there, is he not here also? Why do you have this illusion?" Where is Mysore! And where is Doddaballapuram! In response to mere remembrance of himself by the guru, Niranjana came instantly there! What a great Sivayogi Niranjana was!

Leaving Dodda Ballapuram, Errithatha lived for sometime with loin cloth and a blanket in the Chennarayala hill cave. His nails grew long and twisted. From there, he came to Malleswara Hill. There a devotee by name Bhairappa served the Swami providing food, etc. with intense

devotion. There another sage - Rampuram Erriswami — used to roam along with Errithatha. Errithatha blessed Pedda Lakshamma who served him devotedly with affluence. One day her grandfather happened to meet the sage in the forest. The sage took him to a snake pit and told him: "Spread your blanket here and close your eyes." He did accordingly. Errithatha put his hand in the pit, pulled out some snakes, bundled them in the blanket and told him: "Do pooja to them and then open the bundle." The old man scrupulously followed the instructions. The snakes turned out to be bars of gold. Errithatha stayed for a few days in Kalyanadurg and Mushturu. There he used to appear at different places simultaneously at the same time and talk to devotees. When he saw a dead eagle on the path, he exhorted "Get up and fly!" and it did, flapping its wings. Once when Errithatha was swimming in a well, two women came to have his darshan. The Swami dived deep in the well, surfaced with a snake in each hand and said whoever wanted it, should stretch forth her saree end. One woman, terrified, ran away. The other stretched her saree.

The snake that fell into that transformed itself into a gold bar. Errithatha reached Ealagonda from Uravakonda and staying there for a few days, came back to Chellaguriki.

Errithatha came to Chellaguriki in 1897 and stopped at Mallappagattu two miles away from the village, towards the south. Coming to know that a great sage had come, the villagers went and saw the sage wearing only a loin cloth and immersed in meditation. They asked him his name and native place. Only silence was the Swami's answer. As it was becoming dark and night was fast approaching, the villagers went back. The next day many more came. They requested the Swami to come into the village and stay at some place. He refused but the villagers stayed on and declared that they will not go back until the Swami agreed to come to the village. The Swami was deeply touched by their intense devotion and followed them into the village. For sometime the Swami stayed in a hut under the shade of a neem tree. The hut actually was a watershed which gave water to thirsty travellers. The Swami then shifted to a Siva temple and staying there for some days, later moved to the house of

Doddana Goud. The village was hit by cholera. Perhaps, it was to suggest the outbreak of this disease that the Swami went hundred times to and fro between the Siva temple and the burial ground. Only when the corpses were being removed to the burial ground, as a result of the outbreak of cholera, did the villagers realise the significance of Errithatha shuttling between the temple and the cemetery. In one month, two hundred died from the terrible disease. Errithatha used to throw a stone on a particular house and on whichever house he threw the stone, a person used to die in that house. If he stopped in the middle of hitting the house with a stone, though someone had cholera, he or she survived. When Matham Gangadharappa and Reddy Bhimana Goud, the village elders, asked when the cholera would abate, the Swami said that "final figures have not yet been worked out." After some more died, when Mathapatti Kumarayya and Chakibanda Kari Basavayya asked the Swami when the fatal disease would stop, he said "tomorrow". Then, the villagers brought a strong buffalo (Devaradunna for sacrifice) and kept it before the house of Ramana Goud. The buffalo was incredibly strong and terrified everyone but at the hands of lean Errithatha, it behaved like a kitten. The Sage told the people to worship Devaradunna and send it away. The villagers worshipped the buffalo as per the instructions. The very next day cholera ceased. Hazamu Bhimanna, a barber, constructed a mandir in his land and succeeded in making the Sage stay in it for two years (1902-1904). The descendants of Bhimanna duly worship, to this day, the Swami's hair and nails. It was during that period, that a devoted man, by name Tikkayya, arrived from nowhere and stayed there to serve the Master. In 1905, the villagers built a new house for the Swami on the land near Hampayya's house and took the Swami for stay there.

One day Errithatha was roaming in the streets and stopped at a house. "Give some curds, mother!" he asked. The residents of the house felt annoyed since a calf belonging to them had died and were grieving over it. They talked rudely to the Swami: "We are upset about the death of our animal and you come and ask for curds! What kind of a man you are ?" Errithatha simply smiled and touched the dead calf with his feet. Instantly,

it came alive and ran, jumping with joy, to its mother. Seeing such miracles the villagers sought Errithatha to get rid of calamities which overtook them. But some were inspired by devotion, too, to seek him out. But Tikkayya who came from an unknown place had nothing to ask, was a person with a pure mind, and above all, one given to silence. He was a great man who came searching for a proper guru. When he arrived in the village, there was an avadhuta there, by name Gadige Narasappa. He hailed from Bellary. Tikkayya remained, most of the time, silent and devotedly served Errithatha. The disciple's was silent devotion and the Master's was silent grace. Both derived delight from silence, mounananda. Tikkayya heard that a Math was to be built for this guru and that was enough for him to plunge into the work. He gave up his silence and plunged into work in 1907. Tikka means more or less what is meant by "stubborn", inflexible in anything and Erri means "eccentric", almost always and to imply a shade of madness. Taking together the master and the disciple, in this case, we can say "the stubborn", persistent one understood the "eccentric" and the "eccentric" equally clearly found out "the stubborn." Both understood each other perfectly.

Tikkayya's surrender to his guru was complete, unconditional, and he went round begging for his guru. He sang in praise of his guru melodiously. Thus the guru's power and disciple's devotion blended into a unified consciousness. No wonder it irresistibly attracted the attention of everyone. Many devotees, such as, Sagarada Ishwarappa, Chavani Pakkappa and not only villagers, of Chellaguriki but also of the neighbouring villages filled Tikkayya's "bag" fully. In the years 1908, Tikkayya built a spacious Math for his guru located in a vast piece of land. A strange miracle happened regarding the location of the Math. Once a sage Mariswami of Balaganur was seen building a small "nest" with pebbles at a particular spot. When seeing this seemingly inexplicable act, the villagers asked him, Mariswami replied that in future a great master will come and settle there. And it was at that very spot Errithatha's Math was built by Tikkayya.

The Math was built but it became a great problem to make Errithatha

enter it. One group held that the Swami should live in the Math and another group vehemently opposing it, wanted that the Swami should stay in the village. They represented their respective views to the magistrate and the police officials. When Tikkayya's group went and asked Errithatha, he simply said, "Let the reserve come!" Both the parties received the summons from the magistrate. The officials said that since there was no reconciliation, they would talk to the Swami and then take a decision accordingly. Along with Reserve police, the circle inspector reached Chellaguriki. With firm faith that the Swami would come to the Math, Tikkayya and his followers prepared a grand welcome for him and arrangements were made for serving food to the devotees. The other party thought all this was in vain - since they were confident that the Swami would remain in the village itself.

At the appointed time, the circle inspector arrived and approaching the Swami asked him: "Swamiji! would you like to stay in the village or go to the Math?" The Sage simply said, "Let's go!" and took the path which led to the Math. In 1908 the Swami entered the Math. Tikkayya's joy knew no bounds. A poet who composed poems extempore, he now sang a song instantly with the refrain: "The guru has come! The guru has come!" It was a profoundly thoughtful song, spontaneous and deeply devotional. Indeed, Tikkayya who provided shelter to devotees who came to see or seek favours from the Swami, is a blessed disciple, unique in his devotion. Even as devotees gave, so did devotees come to the Math and had the Swamiji's prasad. The guru and the disciple thus embodied the truth of the axiom that both the giver and the receiver are Siva Himself.

Some villagers who were jealous of the fame and respect which Tikkayya achieved by his activities and devotion to his guru decided that they should either send him away in one way or another or even kill him if that was not possible. Moreover, a rich man who did not have any issues gave away everything that he had to the Math. This made the relations angry that properties which should go to them as his descendants had gone to the Math. And they also decided to get Tikkayya killed. Tikkayya came to know about this, but like a true disciple, he surrendered

to the guru. Errithatha who realised that Tikkayya faced real threat to his life, called him and advised him: "Please, now, go away, son!" He alerted him about the threat. Tikkayya always regarded his Master's words as Vedic injunctions and touching his guru's feet reverentially, without a second thought and without any agony or grief, left the Math and went away. Tikkayya came when his guru wanted him to and did whatever he asked him to do. And he left everything when his guru asked him to leave. It is an instance of rare renunciation. It is easy to renounce every thing but it is difficult to renounce renunciation itself and such a thing comes with great will power. Though he left the Math, he did not forget his guru. He composed a song - "How can I forget my noble guru!" which is a mystic song suggesting the divine insignia of the guru.

After coming to stay in the Math Errithatha didn't go anywhere else. He stayed in the Math from 1908 to 1922 and performed many miracles. And even now miracles which point to his great stature continue to happen. He has devotees from all castes and all religions. Many contemporary yogis, saints and sages came and had his darshan. Rudra Swami a great yogi of Halvi Charanagiri Math came and had his darshan. Ramalinga Swami the great savant of Tamilnadu was a devotee of the Swami. He propagated the teachings of the Swami far and wide in Tamilnadu and Chettinadu. Errithatha gave Sri Gauri Sankara Swami the vision of his true cosmic form. After Tikkayya left, it was Sivaramavadhuta who served the Swami with equal faith and devotion. Among other devotees one can mention A.G. Shyamanna, Padacheri Ramalinga Swami, K. Basavayya, Palturi Siddhalingappa, Umapathayya of Udegola math.

As mentioned the Swami stayed in the Math built by Tikkayya from 1908 to 1922 immersed in Siva-consciousness, and looking after the well-being of his disciples and devotees. On 30.5.1922, suddenly, at 10'o clock in the morning, he asked Chakubanda Kari Basavayya (the Swami called him his "Dafedar") to bring him some water. Chanting the name "Siva! Siva!" he drank the water and merged in Siva. (According to Hindu calendar this was Dundhi year, Jyesta Shuddha Chavithi, Tuesday). His body was given an auspicious bath and adorned with sacred ash (Bhasma)

rudraksha and garlands. It was kept for three days and devotees thousands in number, rushed from distant places to have the last darshan. Along with the Math, Tikkayya got a samadhi also built for his guru. It was there on that very samadhi, that the Swami's body was placed on 1.6.1922. Appropriate rites were done and "Santi samaradhana" was also done. But Errithatha's samadhi is vibrantly alive. If you greet it, it will greet you back. The presence of the Swami is so powerful that even now it wipes the tears of the grief-stricken. Like one's own mother, it feeds you to the full and protects you. As many miracles he did while alive so many, if not more, continue to happen even after his shedding the physical body. He offers his protecting hand to some directly and to some in dreams. When it was proposed to set up an electrically illuminated name-board for the Math, some thing miraculous happened. The devotees were in a dilemma whether they should get it written as "Jeeva Samadhi" (Live Samadhi) or not, the Swami appeared in a dream to Shyamanna and told him: " Let Jeeva Samadhi be written on the board. When I was in Yoga samadhi stupid people thought I was dead and performed samadhi." Then Shyamanna asked, "Should I get the slabs on the samadhi dug up?" The sage replied: "No. Don't do that. Let the opportune time come. Don't rake up any such matter now." The Math grew steadily and is now a bright lamp of spirituality in the encircling darkness.

This is a demonstrated proof of his cosmic power. His annual Aradhana takes place on Jyeshtha Suddha Sashthi. On every Amavasya and Sivaratri, jathras take place every year. Daily morning and evening worship are done regularly.

Shyamanna is a great devotee of the Swami. With great dedication and devotion he extended the original Math, gets the various celebrations performed with the utmost faith and devotion and makes arrangements for the boarding and lodging of thousands of devotees who come to attend the annual functions. Shyamanna is, indeed, the devotee of devotees, the Lord's servant of the servants. Siddha lingappa and Thatrakallu Thatha do similar service. Lodges and dining halls for the convenience of the devotees were built by Umapathayya of Hanchanahalu, Arasappa of

Banglore, Bhagavandas Shyam sundar, Ekambaram Pillai of Madras, Laichand Kevalram and Siddhamma of Bellary. These were inaugurated by the Maharaja of Mysore, Sri Jayachama Rajendra Odayar on 3.4.1960. A large dais with a ceiling above it was built by Dodda Rudrappa of Bellary and Paltur Basappa. The tradition of giving discourses of Lord Siva every Thursday was started by Joladarasi Doddana Gaud, a devotee and a great poet. From 1956, the activities of the math are looked after by a Governing Body.

Just as Siva is playful, Sivayogis are equally sportive. Errithatha, likewise, is attracting many devotees in many ways. He appears vibrantly live in his pictures and images kept for worship. With some people, he communicates through his samadhi. When he was in the physical frame, Errithatha was quite a striking figure: though he turned 100, his face was wrinkle-free; he had an attractive figure with golden complexion, a long beard, a broad forehead, thick eyebrows, eyes instantly attractive in an interior manner, sharp nose, crimson lips, flawless throat, broad chest, long arms, and curved nails, whether he stood up, walked, bent or lie down, he had a posture the beauty of which commensurate with that posture. In short, he had an incomparably attractive body. Smeared with sacred ash (Vibhuti) all over it, the body shone with singular splendour. His rarely spoken words were not easily intelligible. His teaching was the silent comment of Dakshinamurti. If any one dressed him, it was all right; if none did nakedness adorned him. This figure of radiance and splendour, appears, it is saidj even now to his devotees, in dreams. While going from Anantapur to Bellary along with my wife and children I had the inestimable fortune to have darshan of Errithatha's samadhi many times.

Sources

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24. SATTENAPALLI PHIROJI MAHARSHI (1829-1889)

Phiroji Maharshi was an embodiment of devotion (Bhakti) and renunciation (Vairagya). Even while living in the world he was not of the world. He attained perfection in the japa of Sri Ram's holy name, an expert in the doctrine of Achala and an adept at Advaita philosophy. He was a Maharashtrian who settled in Andhra. By the time of Palkuriki Somanatha himself many Are Maharashtrians settled in Andhra. The history of Are Maharashtrians-Marathas-who ruled with Karinakallu in the Pattikonda taluk and Kumool district, is a heroic saga in the folk history of Telugus. During the time of Chatrapathi Shivaji and even after that many Maharashtrians came to settle in Andhra. Shahaji was Shivaji's grandson. His friend Papaji got enrolled in the army of the zamindar of Narsaraopet in the Guntur district and settled in Nekarikallu village. Narsoji was his son. He worked as a Subedar under Manur Venkata Gopalaraya, Zamindar of Sattenapalli and acquired a house and other landed properties. He settled in Sattenapalli. There is a street known as "Marathi Street" in Sattenapalli. Narsoji was a man of great sattvic qualities, peaceful by nature and was highly charitable by temperament. His wife Narsubai was a woman of great virtue, totally devoted to her husband. They did not have children and for seeking the blessings of God visited many pilgrim centers. Once a great sage by name Chidambarayogi visited Sattenapalli. The Narsoji couple had his darshan and sought his blessings for a child. The Yogi taught them the "Aditya mantra". As a result of the unique power of the mantra they had three sons successively. They were named Phiroji, Venkoji and Govind Rao. The eldest son was Phiroji. He was born on 12-7-1829.

Phiroji acquired great proficiency in Sankriti and Telugu by self-effort becoming a great scholar. From an early age, the influence of Chidambarayogi began showing itself in the boy. As a result he used to sing bhajans and kirtans with a melodious voice and unique devotion. He was also a gifted singer of songs with Vedantic themes. One day when

a saint by name Chidananda Yogi came to Sattenapalli, Phiroji served him with great devotion and became the recipient of his compassion. The Yogi taught him not only philosophy but also gave him initiation with the Taraka Mantra; and vanished. From that day Phiroji used to do Japa and study Vedantic texts. As he advanced in age, knowledge of his past life began emerging in his consciousness. He spent his time in serving saints and sages and composing bhajans and kirtans. He developed, alongside, utmost discipline and devotion and dedication. As he came of age, Phiroji married Veerabai, daughter of Ghatakala Venkoji. Veerabai was a greatly devoted wife looking after her husband with care and concern, laced with love. Their householder life was like a lotus that is not tainted by mud and mire. The longing for self-realisation grew in Phiroji. He drank deep at the unfathomable spiritual classics like *Panchadas*,

Seetharamanjaneyasamvada, *Ramastavaraja*, *Vasudevamananam*, *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Upanishads*. All this was reflected in the kirtans and poems he wrote expounding the Vedanta - philosophy. Phiroji received comprehensive initiation into the intricacies of Vedanta philosophy from a great Vedantist of Sattenapalli, by name Jamili Seshayya. Phiroji became mature with the realisation of Vedantic truths and initiated hundreds of devotees, making them achieve self-realisation. Jamili Sehsayya was a disciple of Chittamsetti Lakshmanarya.

(1) Just as he got knowledge of his past life, we have evidence that Phiroji was spontaneously blessed with many occult powers. By a mere glance at a person he used to predict his/her good and bad qualities. When he was nine years old, he was watching his mother, Narsubai, pounding flour with other women in the next street. Meanwhile one Bavirisetti Obayya was driving cattle, which had eaten away his harvested field, to keep them locked up in a pen. Phiroji who saw this and with Obayya in his mind he said, "He doesn't know the calamity that is going to overtake himself but he is going to lock up the cattle in the pen!" The women who overheard this, asked Phiroji what calamity will overtake Obayya. The boy Phiroji said: "He will die before evening!" His mother

and the other women felt that if known this inauspicious prediction will create havoc, and therefore kept silent, without revealing it. As Phiroji foretold, Obayya died, hanging himself that evening. The news spread all over the village like wild fire. Narsubai and other women were wonder-struck. Gradually, Phiroji's foretelling power came to be known by the entire village.

(2) A veshya, harlot, by name Sri Hari who was extremely gifted in her traditional arts of singing and dancing, came from the neighbouring village Madala to Sattenapalli and settled there. She used to pursue her profession. Phiroji was, at that time, in the bloom of youth which added luster to his innate beauty. Sri Hari learnt that he was also a poet and a learned man. She waylaid Phiroji who was going through her street and invited him to her house. She did all honours to him and requested him to compose some javalis (erotic songs) on herself. Phiroji refused but Sri Hari used all her wiles to tempt him. He remained unshaken and like Pravara in the face of Varundhini's temptations did not yield to her charms. On the contrary, he gave her instruction in right knowledge i.e., spirituality. After this encounter, she used to go to the sage's place frequently and listen to his sermons. Gradually she developed intense detachment listening to his teaching, and received initiation from him. She became a great devotee and got the dhawaja stambha, pillar at the entrance of the temple in Madala village built with her money. To this day, it is known as Sri Hari dhawaja. Thus the base metal of Sri Hari got transformed by the touchstone called Phiroji and turned into gold.

(3) Once Phiroji went to Pakalapadu, a neighbouring village. There a merchant approached him said: "Sir, this year we bought huge stocks of indigo and stored them in Sattenapalli. Will its price rise or fall?" Then Phiroji said: "Forget the price. You shift the stocks from that place to another. An accident is going to happen." The merchant ran post-haste and removed the stocks of indigo from that place. The very next day, the godown caught fire and was reduced to ashes. Acchayya, the merchant,

was amazed at the Swami's powers and spread the news of his greatness far and wide.

(4) Once Phiroji went to Chilakaluripeta to see his disciples. At that time, an outbreak of cholera raged in Sattenapalli gradually and touched at last, Veerabai and her child who was breast-fed. They were alarmed and sent a message to Chilakaluripeta. The disciples of Chilakaluripeta insisted that the Swami should go back and sent Ravisetti Sitaramayya to accompany him. Chilakaluripeta is far distant from Sattenapalli. Sitaramayya suggested that they should stop at a village in the evening and resume their journey the next day. But Phiroji insisted that they should continue their journey so that they could reach their destination early. Those were the days of Amavasya and it was intensely dark. The path they took was notorious for dacoits. Though he followed his guru, Sitaramayya was filled with intense fear, even when he was accompanying the guru. In no time, they were surrounded by the thieves. Phiroji started singing a song loudly: "Supreme joy I experience! All our worries are extinct!" When the dacoits came near, he told them his name and that of his village. The dacoits heard about him earlier. They did pranams to him and accompanied him to his village, intoxicated with joy hearing his bhajans.

(5) That night Phiroji rested in a village and reached Sattenapalli, the next day. The town was being ravaged by cholera. The Swami observed the pitiable condition and without even going home, he took a bath in the community well. With water dripping from his clothes, he seated himself on a pyal, under a neem tree and began signing kirtans on the Divine Mother, composing them there and then extempore. At night he went home. By dawn, the severity of cholera abated. Veerabai's child was also saved from the imminent danger. All the town's people praised the Swami and held grand celebrations for the Divine Mother.

(6) One day Phiroji Maharaj was conversing with some people who surrounded him in a street. All of a sudden, appearing distracted, he

moved his walking-stick from one side to another, appearing as if he was forcefully threatening some animal. The persons surrounding him asked what the matter was: Phiroji recovered from his distraction and told them that their herd of cows was about to be attacked by a tiger and he drove away the animal who would have, otherwise, killed the cows. After some days, when the cowherds returned, they asked them and they confirmed that at the very hour the Swamiji was moving the walking-stick, a tiger threatened to attack the cows. But after a few minutes, without attacking any animal, it ran away into the forest. This was confirmed by the cowherds. After hearing about this incident, the villagers realised that Phiroji Maharaj was a great sage who could control, anything at his will overcoming time and distance and that he had tremendous occult power to command and control even cruel, ferocious animals.

(7) To witness the Sri Ram Navami Annual Celebration (on 16.4.1883) Phiroji started for Bhadrachalam along with his devotees and family members. By evening they reached a garden outside a village from where Bhadrachalam was two-destinations away. The hungry pilgrims went to take out from a cart the bag of rice they kept in that, so that they could start cooking. But in that cart of materials for food, the rice bag was missing. They did not notice where the bag fell off from the cart. By that time, it was very dark; children and ladies were famished with hunger. Phiroji Maharaj saw their distress and their pitiable condition, went near a tree and sitting underneath began singing, with overwhelming devotion, extempore thus: "How cruel a man you are Rama! However intensely we pray, you are not to be seen!" At that moment, a Brahmin approached with a rice bag on his head, and said: "I found this bag on the way. If this is yours, please take it." So saying he gave the bag to the driver of the cart and went his way. That driver approached Phiroji Maharaj and told all this. Phiroji called out loudly for that Brahmin. But he got no response and no trace of him was to be found. The group of devotees realised that Ramachandra Himself came in the form of the Brahmin and returned the rice bag. They praised the power of Phiroji Maharaja's intense devotion

in thousand ways. Phiroji praised the immense good fortune of the man who drove the cart for having been blessed with the darshan of Sri Ramachandra Himself.

(8) Invited by a devotee, Maharaj went to a nearby village. Some villagers were not aware of his devotion and detachment. They then made fun of Mahraj with the devotee, taunting: "What is the greatness of your guru? Will he eat rice of ten bags?" The innocent devotee silenced them by claiming that his guru was so great that he could do anything. If he wanted to. He then went back to his guru and implored him that he should knock some sense into their head by doing the needful. Ever compassionate to his devotees, Phiroji Maharaj agreed to do so. The miscreants got, that very evening, ten bags of rice cooked along with curries and other items of a full meal. Phiroji got the rice placed in a room in a huge heap and got the curries kept around the rice heap. He got a lamp kept on the tip of the heap, closed the doors and began meditating on his chosen Idols. When after ten minutes the room was opened, not even a grain of rice was to be found. With that the ignorance and arrogance of the miscreants also vanished.

It is said that another saint by name Kale Mastan Vali (1685-1895) used to come to Phiroji Maharaj and discuss spiritual matters in private. Often Phiroji asked that another leaf plate be kept ready and when asked the reason, he used to say that it was for Kale Mastan Vali (who belonged to Guntur). Accordingly, Vali used to arrive exactly at the time of taking food. He took his food and the event always made the follower of Phiroji extremely happy. Another contemporary of Phiroji Maharaj was the famous Manikya Prabhu (1817-1865), who belonged to Humnabad which was earlier in the former Nizam state but is now in the Bidar district of Karnataka. Manikya Prabhu is the third most important figure associated with the Dattatreya tradition, generally mentioned after the other illustrious figures, Sri Pada Sri Vallabha and Narasimha Saraswati. They recognized Phiroji as one on par with themselves. Chirumamilla Subbadasu (1802-

1882) belonging to Dharmavaram located in Guntur district and Durgi Mandal was another famous saint of that time.

Phiroji Maharaj always explained the abstruse doctrines of Advaita in a simple way which attracted devotees not only the residents of Sattenapalli but also many from far off places. They became his disciples. Among them mention should be made of Enumala Kondaiah of Garudachala Palem, Kunduru Papi Reddy Venkata Reddy of Kundurivari Palem, Eepuru Veera Reddy of Varusa Talluru, Munnaluru Venkata Reddy of Sattenapalli, Jillellamudi Acchayya of Komirepudi and Janga Rama Reddy, Vanama Subbarayadu of Etukuru, Patibandla Veerayya of Deepaladinne Palem. Among Government officials, Dr.Tiruchinappalli Rangaswami Setty working in the hospital at Karempudi, the police inspector of Sattenapalli, Kooretic Naganna Naidu, Dr. Govindarajulu Naidu of Thumurugodu. Among these, Rangaswami Setty, had a very low opinion of Vedanta and Vedantists. He brought Phiroji Maharaj to his village and kept him in a house, with the intention of testing him. After some days, he was convinced that Phiroji was a true saint. He absorbed fully the Vedanta Philosophy taught by Phiroji Maharaj and later, wrote a book *Muktipradayini (The Giver of Liberation)* in the form of conversation between the Master and the Disciple. His fame spread far and wide in the Guntur district. Gradually he became a great philosopher and siddha. Since Phiroji Maharaj disregarded all distinctions of caste, colour and creed as a Vedantist, he allowed devotees of various castes to be his disciples. Among his chief disciples, Ramadas and Appalaswami belonged to the Harijan community, Lal Sahib of Kunkalagunta was a Muslim. The way in which Lal Sahib came to be a disciple of Phiroji Maharaj is a very fascinating and strange story.

Lal Sahib lived in Kunkalagunta of Palnad taluk and belonged to the weaver's caste among the Muslims. He was a great adept in playing on the Shehnai: Nadaswara. He was also efficient in playing on the drum, flute and algoj. There was none in those days to equal him in playing Nadaswara. For nine months in a year, he used to give concerts at places

far off from his village. Thus he earned fame and money abundantly. Once or twice he met Phiroji Maharaj. Gradually he developed great spiritual thirst. He gave concerts for annual celebrations at Tripurantaka, the Math belonging to Brahmam at Banaganapalle. He was longing to get initiated by a competent guru. In the presence of Manikya Prabhu (1817-1885), he played Shehnai and received his blessings when Manikya Prabhu blessed him with a plate of silver rupee coins. Lal took out some more from his pocket and placing them in the plate, kept it at Manikya Prabhu's feet imploring him to accept him as a disciple. He circumambulated the great sage and beseeched him for liberation. The sage was pleased and initiated him with the Taraka mantra. He then ordered him to take initiation into the full and complete Achala path from Phiroji Maharshi staying in Sattenapalli. Lal Sahib returned and sought out Phiroji Maharshi and told him about Manikya Prabhu's command and joined the band of Phiroji's disciples. The guru tested Lal Sahib for a long time and seemed to delay the deeksha.

One summer Veerabai and Phiroji went to see their daughter living in Obulesupalle. While returning through a jungle, they felt extremely tired and rested on the banks of a tank. Lal Sahib was returning at that time from Chejerla where he went to give a concert. He saw his guru and did them most devoted service to make them recover from their tiredness. The guru was immensely pleased and there itself he initiated Lal Saheb into the realization of the Ultimate Bliss that one experiences through Achala sadhana. Lal Saheb became the foremost of Phiroji's disciples and proved himself as much an accomplished musician as an adept at Vedanta Sadhana. He gave guidance to many people. When his guru passed away (9.7.1889), Lal Sahib saw him in a dream. He immediately rushed to Sattenapalli and at the time of his guru's Samadhi sang many songs praising the guru. He thus made the disciples shed tears of grief as well as tears of aesthetic joy. On the very tithi (Ashadha Shuddha Ekadasi, 10-7-1897, Saturday) on which Phiroji passed away, Lal Sahib died at the age of sixty. During the day of his guru's Aradhana he always came

to Sattenapalli and did whatever he could in service of his Master. He charged his descendants with this responsibility before he gave up his body.

Phiroji Maharshi lived exactly for 60 years. His children are: (1) Lakshmoji Rao, (2) Govinda Rao, (3) Lakshmi Bai, (4) Veerabai, (5) The Elder (peda) Govindabai, and (6) The Younger (China) Govindabai. The sons took initiation from their father and looked after the family. Phiroji used to travel extensively blessing devotees and initiating them. When he was at the prime of life, he did lot of heavy physical labour. Resting for a while at noon, he then did writing of books. He used to compose extempore many songs, bhajans and keertans and write them out. He was a true and eminent guru by thought, word and deed. His behavior was an ideal for all. (1) Walking humbly with a downcast head (2) Restricted speech, a man of few words. (3) Not observing people who came and went (4) Observing the vow of silence rigidly. The pandits mistook his silence and his talk of few words as indicating great egoism. They went to the Zamindar and told him that he was full of pride. At an assembly that the Zamindar arranged to check for himself, Phiroji Maharshi impressed everyone with his modesty and answered whatever questions people posed with great decorum and affection. He never accepted money from even his most affluent disciples. Until he was 55 years of age, he never knew what was illness. Ever since he was 56, because of his illness, he used to travel in a bullock cart to see his disciples and devotees. In the morning he used to take rice and wheat cake in the night. During his last days, he was totally immersed in writing. When the disciples asked him why he subjected himself to so much strain, he replied that his life was coming to a close and therefore he had to complete the writing of the book. One evening, abruptly, he called his wife and children and his chief disciples to come immediately. He sat in the lotus posture, facing the east and telling his son Lakshmoji Rao to establish the guru's center (Gurupitha), entered the state of intense Samadhi. On 9-7-1889, (the night of Virodhi year, Ashadha Shuddha Ekadasi, Tuesday) he uttered

the mantra "Hara, Hara Hara" thrice and saying "Sivarpanam" ("May everything be surrendered to Siva") he gave up his body, The vital breath-prana - was released through what is called Brahmarandhra. By morning, disciples and devotees from the surrounding villages came in large numbers. Bhanuri Lakshmi Narayana a Satavadhani - who was on a tour of the area participated in Phiroji's last rites performed by the sons and disciples in the garden of the Maharshi himself.

The fact of Phiroji Maharshi's Samadhi was signalled to some more people, like Lal Saheb. One by name Picchayya was a washerman. Unable to bear the difficulties at home he took to the forests and had darshan of Maharshis in the cavern situated at Guttikonda, when he asked innocently to whom the sixth peetha belonged, someone replied that it belonged to Phiroji Maharshi of Sattenapalli. He was told the date on which Maharshi would reach the cave(m). Picchayya went in search of Maharshi and reached Sattenapalli on the very day the Maharshi left the body. He had darshan of the Maharshi in this manner. On his way to Sattenapalli, Picchayya went to Vemavaram village and told about the message he got from the persons in he cave(m). Hearing this, Papi Reddy and some others belonging to Sanampudi and Sirasala Veerayya of Sattenpalli rushed to Sattenapalli and participated in the last journey of the Maharshi. A radiant photo that most probably was taken when Phiro Maharaj was between 45 to 50 years of age, shows his very handsome physical frame, the large Kumkum dot appearing as Siva's third eye on the broad forehead the thick moustachios, the turban and broad shoulders.

In accordance with the orders of his father, his eldest son Lakshmoji built a Math in his father's memory in 1901 and became its head. His eldest son Phiroji Baba became the head after his father from (1907 to 1975). Phiroji Baba's eldest son Pulahari Lakshmoji Baba is the present head (1998). Vanama Subbarayudu and Patibandla Veerayya were the chief disciples of Phiroji Maharshi. It is because of their initiative that the building of the Math was made possible. Vanama Subbarayadu got GuCharitra written and published in 1928. This was written by Etukuri

Sitaramayya. Along with it, in 1945 Phiroji's works were published with editing done by Mahavadi Venkataratnam. Again, after a long gap was published a book entitled *Phiroji Rsihindra-His life and works* was printed in 1994. The present head Lakshmoji Baba successfully held the Brahmotsava of the Maharshi's centenary celebrations on a grand scale and got a special commemorative volume published on that occasion. Among the Maharshi's disciples, Putibandla Veerayya was a realised one. He was an adept a great yogi in the Swarasastra and the symptoms of Chaya Parusha. At 60 years of age (1922) he became merged in the Ultimate reality. He deserves a high place in the chronicles of Andhra Yogis and we will do that at the appropriate place. Along with the Samadhis of the heads of the Math, the Samadhis of these two are also to be found in the precincts of the Math itself. I had the good fortune of seeing them on 29.9.1996. Earlier Phiroji Maharshi's Aradhana celebrations were celebrated on Ashadha Shuddha Ekadasi. Since it was the rainy season, a small scale pooja is done on that day and on Magha Shuddha Ekadasi celebrations are done on a grand scale.

Phiroji Maharshi acquired deep and extensive scholarship in both Telugu and Sanskrit early in his bodyhood itself and started writing at the age of 12. Though he did not receive any apprenticeship in writing poetry, Maharshi composed poetry extensively in Telugu and Sanskrit. Many of his works were printed. Some remain unpublished. Among his works, mention should be made of (1) *Sri Rama Sataka* which he composed in his boyhood. (2) *Seshaguru Sataka* was written by Maharshi addressed to Jamili Seshacharya who taught him Vedantic doctrines. (3) *Namassivaya* song which resembles *Narayana Sataka*. Every line in this poem ends with Namassivayah. (4) *Paramananda Sudhaljahari* is a collection of 34 "Kirtans". Most of them are extempore compositions and are of great help to spiritual seekers. (5) *Panchikaranam* is a prose piece. It gives details of yoga. (6) *Swaprakasa* is a very mature work of . Maharshi and portrays the subtleties of Achala Philosophy. This was dedicated to Chitemsetti Lakshmanacharya who was the guru of Jamili

Seshayya and consists of 128 verses. (7) *Acharya Sataka*. This is composed by Phiroji evoking Sri Ramachandra as his guru. This is a great Vedantic treatise and is, perhaps, his last work. (8) *Tattva Sangraha*, a book of philosophy. We have in this book, the geneology of Jamili Seshacharya. (9) *Pannagachala Nayaka Sataka*. (10) *Gajendra Moksha*. (11) *Satrajiteeya* (12) *Prahlada Charitha*. These three show the influence of Pothana's Bhagavatha. Further, Phiroji Maharshi wrote (13) *Shatkanda Ramayana*, a *Burakatta* (14) *Darukavana Vihara*. (15) *Dasavathara*. (16) *Sri Rama Dandaka* (17) *Sri Markandeya Vilasa* (18) *Sri Ramachandranya Sataka*. (19) *Ekavimsatyavathara Stotra*. (20) *Sivaleela Mahattu*.

These are some of his works, Some are unpublished. These works show that the Maharshi could write effortlessly and effectively in both Telugu and Sanskrit. We can see that he gave importance to subject matter rather than mere literary skill and that he could explain lucidly very complex Vedantic doctrines. Phiroji Maharshi who, like Vemana and Veerabrahmam gave importance to humanity rather than caste, creed and colour and propagated Bhakti as the under lying principle is worthy of our veneration.

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25. PUDUKKOTA JUDGE SWAMI

(Sadasiva Brahmendra Saraswati II)

(1850-1915)

The vagaries of fate are strange. Fate is invincible. It makes a householder a renunciate and a renunciate a householder. The seed which lies buried in the earth for years together, when the time comes, suddenly grows and becomes a mighty tree. Born in Andhra, winning laurels as a famous advocate in the Madras High Court, and eventually becoming the Chief Justice of Travancore High Court, the history of this Judge Swami who later gave up everything, ran away to the woods and finally entered Mahasamadhi in Pudukkota in Tamilnadu, is, indeed, extremely fascinating.

In the early years of the nineteenth century, a great scholar by name Vedamurti Sastri, lived in Dhavaleswaram a village situated on the banks of the sacred Godavari river. He studied Vedas in Varanasi. He achieved renown as a great scholar in both Sanskrit and Telugu. His family deity was Bhadrachala Sri Ramachandra. When Sir Arthur Cotton built the barrage across the Godavari at Dhavaleswaram (1847-1852), some villagers, seized by the fear of Godavari river inundating their village, left Dhavaleswaram. Vedamurtisastri was one such who left his village and settled in Visakhapatnam. There a son was born to Vedamurti. He was radiant with a golden hue of the skin and a divine grace. Charmed by his beauty and grace, the neighbours used to come frequently to see the boy. His mother used to clothe her son in various dresses, adorn him with many kinds of gold ornaments and feel happy. His father cast the son's horoscope and realised that his son was destined to become a renunciate. This created untold tension in him.

The child was sent to school when he was five years old and the father himself taught him Telugu and Sanskrit. At the age of eight the boy's thread ceremony was performed. He grew up, finished his school, and was to join a college for further studies. Vedamurti Sastri wanted his

son to become a Vedic Scholar. But the son wanted to study English along with the Vedic studies. Vedamurti Sastri realised that it was his duty to fulfill his son's desire. In those days Madras was the capital for the combined Andhra and Madras states. The son said that he would pursue higher education in Madras. Vedamurti Sastri was surprised that his son, whose horoscope predicted that he would be a renunciate, wanted to pursue English education. Since the Vedic scholar did not have any property, movable or immovable, in his native place, it was immaterial whether he lived here or in Madras. Vedamurti Sastri went to Madras with his wife and son and settled in the Triplicane area. To make his son pursue secular education, Vedamurti Sastri underwent great many financial difficulties. He used to give discourses on religion and dharma, earn some money which enabled him to support his son's studies. In no time, he learned Tamil, gave impressive discourses in that language too and earned reputation as an able speaker and a great scholar. The son pursued his studies with dedication and soon joined the Law College. He soon got the law degree and after working as an apprentice with an experienced senior lawyer, set up his own practice. Vedamurti Sastri performed his son's marriage, happy that he successfully settled in life, and free from all duties he left along with his wife for Kashi to spend the rest of his life there (1870).

In no time, the lawyer-son gained immense reputation. But he used to accept only cases that were in accord with his principles of truth and justice. He used to defend truth and justice. He never used to accept cases of a deceptive nature, tempted by money. His legal acumen was only for the sake of justice and not for mere money. In course of time, he was blessed with children and along with affluence he achieved great name and fame. But he continued his Vedic study, as per the promise he made to his father and twenty years passed in this way (1890).

Though the British ruled India, there were some independent states. One such was the state of Travancore. Its capital city was Tiruvanthapuram. The kings used to rule the state as representatives of Lord Ananthapadmanabha Swami who was the presiding deity of the

place. At that time, a vacancy for Chief Justice of the High Court arose. The ruler was keen to appoint a richly deserving person to fill the vacancy. A search was on for a qualified person with unimpeachable character.

The king heard about the scholarship and learning, intelligence and character of the lawyer. Moreover, he was an adherent of Vedic principles, a great devotee of Vishnu, and a scholar of many languages. Hearing about all these, the ruler was keen to see him and the desire became stronger day by day. He doubted whether such a distinguished advocate with fabulous income would condescend to accept to be the Chief Justice with a low income. If he accepts, the ruler knew, it would enhance the prestige and power of the High Court. Thinking that he would not accept the order of appointment if he sent it straightaway, he decided to send an emissary. He sent the dharmadhikari of his court, who was also an expert in many languages to convey his intention. The dharmadhikari met him and told him that he came from Tiruvanthapuram and he brought the prasada from Ananthapadmanabha Swami temple. The lawyer accepted it gratefully and gracefully and the emissary praised the lawyer's qualities of head and heart as well as his professional eminence as an advocate. The dharmadhikari, in the course of the talk, told him that it is proper and fit that for his brilliance and talent he is fit to occupy the position of the Chief Justice. In the course of the talk, the emissary also learnt that Vedamurti Sastri, the advocate's father, was also his classmate. He felt greatly pleased and revealed the purpose of his visit. He assured the lawyer that in the discharge of his duty there would not be any interference from anyone and he would enjoy complete freedom. Eventually the lawyer agreed to accept the assignment offered to him. The time arrived when the reason for his birth would manifest itself. He left Madras and assumed charge as Chief Justice at Tiruvananthapuram.

The ruler of Travancore greatly liked the personality and sublime qualities of his Chief Justice. In delivering judgement on cases, he showed uncommon intelligence. In judging a case he looked at different aspects such as custom, the law as suggested in the legal texts, local conventions and family traditions and background, - taking these four aspects into consideration, he used to

SAGES deliver his judgment. He firmly adhered to the view that all are equal before the law. He never gave in to the authority and money of highly placed people. In this fair and fearless way he discharged his duties for six years (1896). During these six years, he also acquired uncommon proficiency in both Malayalam and Kannada and wrote many books in Telugu, English and Kannada languages. But we do not have, unfortunately, any information about what these books are.

Once he had to examine a murder case. Though the accused person appeared to have committed the crime, his conscience and inner voice persistently echoed and intuitively told him that he was not the culprit. The trial went on for one week. As a judge he heard the arguments of both the sides. The time came to deliver the judgement and on the plate of his mind the pictures of the innocent face of the accused and the pitiable condition of his wife and children appeared. Though his inner voice insisted that he was innocent, the situation arose wherein, as per the laws he had to declare capital punishment for the crime. He questioned himself: "Why should cling to the position of the Chief Justice by passing judgement ignoring the intimations of his inner voice?" If he punished the criminal according to law, his family will become destitute and untold misery will accrue to them. Instead, isn't it better, if his own family should suffer. Then what will the world think? It will think that he failed miserably in the discharge of his duties. He said to himself, "I will renounce everything and seek refuge in God. Why should one bother about the opinion of the world when one give up everything?" True to his thinking, the judge gave up his job, cut himself off from his family and came out of the court. Even as the persons who assembled were sitting keenly looking forward to his judgement, he walked fast in the direction of a forest. The ruler was stunned to hear what had happened. Both the family members and the Raja's employees went desperately in search of the judge but all in vain.

Like the Buddha, the judge went through the deep forests in search of Truth. If on the way anyone gave him food, he ate; or else he fasted. Seeing temples and sages he travelled through Tirunelveli, Tiruchendur, Madurai, Tiruchi, Tanjavur, Tiruvarur and finally reached

There he received a divine command that he should move in the northerly direction via Tiruvannamalai, he reached Kanchipuram. At every place he visited, he searched for a guru. After visiting the temple in Kanchipuram, he arrived at the Upanishad Math, established by Upanishad Brahmendra Saraswati. He requested the head of this Math to give him deeksha (initiation). The head recognised the great scholarship and the burning sense of renunciation that the judge showed. But, though he didn't accede to his request to give deeksha, he advised the judge to continue with his study of the scriptures and provided him with all the facilities. The judge who until now looked for the truth in legal contexts, started searching for the Ultimate Truth as propounded by the Upanishads. He undertook the study for five years (1899). He moved from there and reached Sri Kalahasti. There is, in Kalahasti, a sacred pond - Pushkarini - where sage Bharadwaja did penance. Near that pond, a sage by name Sri Rama Krishnavadhuta lived in a cottage immersed in meditation. If anyone kept some food in a clay pot placed outside the cottage, the Avadhuta, if he felt like it, partook the food once in two or three days. Without talking to anyone, he sat in the cottage always immersed in samadhi. Strangely at the very moment the judge reached the cottage, the Avadhuta came out, as if he was expecting someone, looked at him and without saying a word to him went inside again.

Sri Ramakrishnavadhuta Swami didn't come out of the cottage for a week. The judge waited for him without sleep or food even. He thought that anytime the Avadhuta can come out and it would be dreadful to miss him when he did come out. He waited patiently for the darshan of the Avadhuta. After a week the Avadhuta came out and smiled compassionately at the waiting judge. The judge touched his feet with respect and devotion and prayed to him to give him sanyas. The Avadhuta took the judge inside the cottage and blessed him. He initiated him giving him the name Sadasiva Brahmendra which was already well-known in Andhra. He asked him to undertake a pilgrimage all over the country, going naked. The Avadhuta asked him to visit Nerur which was associated with the celebrated Sadasiva Brahmendra and sanctified by him (1560-

1750). The judge who came out of the court with only his clothes on, now had only the earth's directions - diks - as his wardrobe. In accordance with his guru's instruction, he went to Nerur spent some time in tapas at the Samadhi of Sadasiva Brahmendra and then took to the Himalayas. He travelled all over the country without entering any village or town. He moved on the borders and through the forests. He ate whatever was offered by persons whom he met on his way. After seeing the pilgrim places in North India, he did tapas for sometime in Rishikesh. He then returned to South India and stopped at Manamadurai near Madurai, as if he was awaiting the arrival of someone.

There was a Vedic School in Ganampet, a small village near Pudukkota. Narasimha Swami, Narasimhan and Guruswami were three brothers who lived in that village along with their mother and their yo brother Krishnamurti. The three brothers pursued Vedic studies. Krishnamurti wanted to pursue the spiritual life. But his brothers and his mother were averse to this idea. Against all opposition, Krishnamurti was desperately seeking a guru. He heard that there was a great sage by name Judge Swami in Manamdurai. He went in search, found the Swami and prayed to him, imploring him to give sanyas. The Judge Swami knew that Krishnamurti was extremely sincere and fit for what he asked. But he wanted to test him and quietly left the place without saying a word. Krishnamurti followed him doggedly. The Judge Swami, testing Krishnamurti further, threw stones at him. But Krishnamurti remained unaffected. The Judge Swami felt pleased at his determination, asked him to come near and explained the difficulties in leading an Avadhuta's life. He then asked him to go to his mother, take her permission, circumambulate her and asked him to visit the pilgrim centers all over the country. He gave him sanyas and gave him the new name of Swayam Prakash. This event took place in the year 1900.

Judge Swami's wish was fulfilled. He didn't want anything else than to pursue his tapas, uninterruptedly. But in this strange world there are un-enlightened people who dislike the enlightened ones. Some such miscreants developed, without any reason, intense aversion and hatred

towards the Swami. One day when the Swami was in state of intense samadhi, they cut off his long hair and his beard. But the Swami neither scolded nor cursed them. He felt that it was God Himself testing him in this way. He left that place and came to Tiruchi. He realised that the time for his exit from the world drew near. He reached Nartamalai which was nine miles away from Pudukkota. In that place there was an ancient Siva temple built by the Chola Kings. The Judge Swami lived in that temple and continued his tapas. Impressed by the divine radiance of the Swami, the villagers used to offer milk and fruits and serve him. Though the villagers never knew anything of the Swami's antecedents, they served him devotedly and faithfully. One day they made the Swami sit in a palanquin and reciting appropriate Vedic mantras with great devotion, carried him in a procession to Pudukkota. By the time the palanquin procession reached the middle of Pudukkota town, the Swami's soul left the body. The news reached the Diwan of the town Venkata Ramadas Naidu. He came post haste and recognised the Swami. He was not an anonymous nonentity of a sanyasi. He was his class fellow during the college studies. Moreover Naidu worked as a junior when the Swami was an advocate in Madras city. He explained and extolled the greatness of the Swami to those who gathered at the body of the Swami. He got the funeral rites of the Swami performed with full government honours. The Rajah of the place Marthanda Bhairava Thondaman (1886-1928) granted some land for the samadhi of the Judge Swami to the East of the Pudukkota town. The Swami's body was taken through the streets of the town in procession. Diwan Naidu also became one of the pall-bearers. The Swami was cremated in accordance with all the Vedic rites. In Tamilnadu, the samadhis of sages and hermits are called Adhishthanams. Regular worship is done in such places, and for some time daily worship was done at Judge Swami's samadhi.

After sometime the samadhi was neglected. Due to sheer inertia devotees who came earlier for daily worship stopped coming. The daily worship ceased. Debris and dust gathered around the samadhi.

After sometime the samadhi place itself could not be recognised. But the pitiable condition of the samadhi appeared in a vision to Swayamprakasa Swami who was the Swami's chief disciple and who was doing tapas in the cave situated in the Sendamangala Hill in Salem district. He started immediately and reached Pudukkota. He removed the debris in and around the area and located the place where his guru's samadhi was originally situated. He lit a lamp again there. He kindled the embers of the faith and devotion Pudukkota people had for the Judge Swami. Some advocates and retired judges formed themselves into a group and started the daily pooja again. They prepared plans for building a memorial on the samadhi and its reconstruction. P.V. Raghunath Iyer, a retired judge became the President of the committee formed for that purpose. Since the land granted by the Raja of Pudukkota was not registered properly, it changed hands, and eventually came into the possession of Padmanabha Sastri, another judge. His son Bala Subrahmanya Sastri joyfully gifted the land to the Memorial Committee. The devoted lawyers and people of Pudukkota got a memorial built on the Judge Swami's samadhi and got a pillar installed. On 31.5.1936, under the auspices of Swayamprakasa Swami a Kumbabhisheka was duly performed. With the efforts of Swayamprakasa Swami, the samadhi regained its earlier glory. A Sivalinga and an image of Dattatreya were installed in the temple compound. Swayamprakasa Swami was also a great Digambara (naked) Avadhuta. He was blessed with all the eight siddhis (occult powers). Among his chief disciples were Sankarananda, Kasi Nijananda, a great poet, a great scholar Turayananda and Santananda, the crest-jewel among disciples. Before he gave up his body on 29-12-1948, Swayamprakasa Swami entrusted Santanada with the responsibility of maintaining the Judge Swami's Math.

Santananda Swami was also a great sage. He built a grand samadhi mandir for his guru in Sendamangala. He established Skandashram in Skandagiri near Selam. He also established an Yajurveda School. He installed an image of Bhuvaneswari Devi in the area of Judge Swami's

samadhi, who was his guru's guru. With the installation of Bhuvaneswari Devi's image the samadhi mandir grew rapidly. That area is now called Bhuvaneswari Nagar. The recorded history shows that Santananda Swami held yajnas, seminars on Vedanta, festivals of music, bhajans, etc., uninterruptedly.

Judge Swami is a scintillating star in the spiritual sky of Andhra Pradesh. We do not know what name his parents gave him. The name - Sadasiva Brahmendra II-which his guru Ramakrishna Avadhuta gave him in Sri Kalahasti disappeared into the void - even before he left the borders of Andhra. In course of time, the name he had as Chief Justice in Trivancoor has also vanished. The name Judge Swami alone given by people survived. Today his samadhi is a great spiritual center. It is now called "Sri Sadguru Sadasiva Brahmendra Saraswatya Avadhuta Centre". I saw the glory and grandeur of the place on 11-2-1996. I also had darshan of Santananda on 12-2-1996 in Skandashram at Udayapatti. The annual celebrations of the Judge Swami take place in Vaisakha month and Hasta Nakshatra. People know only the images of Sri Bhuvaneswari, Ashtadasa Bhujas Lakshmi, Vinayaka and Skanda. Very few know of the Judge Swami's samadhi below the Sivalinga. Santananda visits this place every month from Salem to look after and supervise its activities.

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26. SANARI VISWANADHAVADHUTA (1856-1914)

Among those who prophesied about the future, Pothuluri Veerabrahm is the foremost. What he declared in his *Govindavakyas* about the advent of Viswanadhavadhuta is the incarnation of Kasi Viswanatha Himself. His life-story is a treasure house of miracles. It is generally held that Veerabrahmam is the incarnation of Vishnu and Viswanadhavadhuta is the incarnation of Siva. In the spiritual firmament they are the sun and the moon who are the cosmic lights of the universe. There is a gap of nearly two hundred years between them. Swama Subrahmanya Kavi, Karri Achyutha Rama Rao and Medapati Venkata Reddy wrote about Viswanadhavadhuta. There is a wide variation of opinion about the period in which the Avadhuta lived. There is no consensus about this among the three writers. But, for some valid reasons, the period decided by Venkata Reddy (1850-1914) seems closest to being probable.

Let us now look at his life story and the miracles he performed. In a village called Palakonda situated on the banks of river Nagavali in the Srikakulam district, there lived a devout couple by name Simhadri Veerachari and Gouri Devi. They belonged to the goldsmith caste. They undertook journeys to all the pilgrim places in the country, praying to the Gods for children. They went to and offered worship at the samadhi of Pothuluri Veerabrahmam at Kandimallayya Palli and Bhramaramba and Mallikarjuna Swami at Srisailam. As a result, a son was born to them on Monday, Kartika Suddha Panchami of that year. At that auspicious hour, bells rang by themselves in the temple. He was given, at the ceremony of naming the child the name of Viswanadhacharya. When he was five years old the ceremony of initiating into education was performed. A child gifted with incredible, prodigious memory, at a very early age he completed the exhaustive study of the Vedas, Kavyas and Ithihasas. He also became an expert in alchemy, the traditional vocation of the family. When he was only 7 or 8 years old, in a Siva Temple in the village he taught children about God, about God's creation, sustenance and

dissolution, Srishti, Sthithi and Laya, as they are called. One day while he was teaching, a dead goat was being carried by its owner along the street. The Avadhuta saw this and made the goat live again. The owner and the boys spread news about this miracle in the village. The villagers of Palakonda praised him as God Himself. At the age of 12, the Avadhuta's mother died. Veeracharya, his father, looked after him with great care and affection so that he would not feel his mother's absence. The Avadhuta's thread ceremony was performed when he was 12 years old. That very year the father fell seriously sick and realizing that death was inevitable any moment, he taught his son all the ethical norms, entrusted him to the care of his elder brother's son Neelayyacharya. Shortly after that the father passed away.

After his father's death Viswanadhavadhuta's dress and behavior changed totally. Finishing his daily routine of bath, etc., he offered worship at the Siva temple outside the village and went on writing something on the palm leaf manuscripts. If he felt like it, he used to go back home and eat something. He used to talk to himself, strangely and adorn his body with garlands made of Rudraksha beads. Seeing these symptoms of detachment and renunciation, Neelayyacharya taught him all the traditional trade secrets he learnt from his uncle. Viswanadhavadhuta used to do all that was entrusted to him in no time but used to go to the temple and spend most of his time there.

He was now 20 years old. Neelayyacharya felt that it was time to get him married, advised also by the village elders who felt that this would wean the youth away from renunciation. But they were all skeptical that none would offer their girl in marriage to a person who stays in the temple like a viragi, a monk. Neelayyacharya consulted his wife and decided to do whatever was needed. But surprisingly Viswanadhaya himself told that the bride meant for him was growing up elsewhere and there was no need for his brother to go in search of a bride. Instead, the Avdhuta himself went out on a pilgrimage of the holy places on the Nagavali river coast. Near Palakonda there was a village by name Uttaravalli. There in the village a girl by name Annapurna, born, due to

the blessings of Annapurna Parameswari of Kasi to Daivajnachari and Jnana Prasunamba encountered Viswanadhayya on the street, one da and took him home and offered him the hospitality due to an honored guest. Annapurna recognised Viswanadhayya as the incarnation of Siva Himself and told her parents that he was her husband, destined to move her. In the year 1873 they were duly married, Annapurna came to her in-law's place and served her husband as the incarnation of Siva Hims Viswanadhayya taught the mode of "Ajapa Gayatri" spiritual practice . Annapurna and led a householder's life as a Rajayogi.

One day, the only son of a farmer living in the village died of snake while returning home after his daily work in the field. The farmer and wife, stricken with intolerable grief, brought the son's body to the pre of Viswanadhayya, crying inconsolably. They implored him to save the child. The Swami entered a "Mudrayoga" state and ordered the snake to return to the place forthwith. The snake came, touched the bitten with its tongue and went away. The dead son got up, revived. The villa and the parents praised Viswanadhayya as Siva Incarnate.

After three years, Nelayyacharya asked Viswanadhayya and Annapurna to live separately. They did accordingly and were living hap But the caste people did not like a householder-Viswanadhayya - weari a renunciate's clothes, grow a beard and wear Rudraksha beads, etc. For their eyes he appeared like a sorcerer who performs black magic and without any reason at all they hated him, filled with jealousy. They told Neelayyacharya that unless Viswanadhayya changed his attire and his behavior they would ostracise him from the clan.

One day Viswanadhayya went to take his bath in a tank situated outside the village. On another side of the tank, Veerayya who belonged to the merchant (Vaisya) caste and Somulu who was a washerman were taking their bath. Viswanadhayya spread his towel on the water and sat in the lotus posture on that. The cloth floated on the water like a boat and moved by itself, to the center of the tank. On the middle of the tank Viswanadhayya took a dip and went under water, remaining there for

considerable time. After that he surfaced in the water and offered oblations to the Sun God. Then walking on the water just like that, he reached the bank of the tank. Veerayya and Somulu who were watching the entire episode ran to him and fell at his feet. They begged him to accept them as his disciples. The Swami accepted. Both the disciples widely propagated the fact that their guru assumed the human form with a purpose, that he was capable, with a mere wish, of doing and undoing things and that his teachings indicated the path of divine knowledge. All this roused the jealousy of some pandits. They devised a trap to test the Swami. They asked a boy to pretend that he was dead, then placed him on the bier and taking the corpse via the street where Viswanadhayya lived, challenged him to make the dead boy come alive. "We will then accept that you are born with a divine plan and you are an incarnation of God," they told him. Viswanadhayya said: "I am, like you, an ordinary person. I cannot do what you want me to. Get lost!" After going some distance, they asked the boy to get up and they realised to their horror that the boy was really dead. The pandits were caught in the very trap they laid for the Swami. When the boy's parents came crying with the dead body and fell at the Swami's feet to forgive them, the Swami took some water from his Kamandalu and sprinkled it on the corpse. The boy got up as if he was waking up after sleep. The parents declared the Swami as God himself. But the pandits said that it was all black magic.

The majority of people in Palakonda were stricken with addiction to worldly things. The paths of Devotion, Knowledge, Yoga and detachment which the Swami propagated were not palatable to them. But the Swami was full of compassion for them. He used to teach Vedanta philosophy to Veerayya and Somulu. Annapuranamma also used to participate in the discussions and thus became an expert in yoga. After some days she gave up the body by the yogic mode called "Kapala Bhedana". This happened at 10 o' clock in the morning. But the caste people or even Neelayyacharya refused to attend the obsequies. The Swami waited until 10 o' Clock in the night and realizing that none would turn up, with the help of his disciples consigned the body of Annapumamma to the

flames and came back home by 12 o' clock in the night. But after some time, the entire house was filled with light and Annapumamma appeared saying that she disliked staying alone in the burial ground. She then requested that her body must be cremated in the house itself. The Swami consoled her and prophesied that in future she will be born in a Vaishya family in the Mysore state and that she will again meet him. Acceding to her wish, the Swami, with the help of his disciples, brought the body again and cremated it in the house itself. But the pandits and fellow cast people complained to the village officer that to have a burial ground in the very center of the village was inauspicious and meant that the village would be visited with many calamities. They also incited Neelayyacharya against the Swami. Though the Swami repeatedly tried to convince him that it was not an ordinary samadhi, he turned a deaf ear to his brother and raised his hand in anger to slap him. The Swami cursed Neelayyacharya. As a result his four sons died, one after the other. When the daughter Bhramaramba became ill, Neelayyacharya was filled with fear that she would also die. He rushed to the Swami seeking his forgiveness; the Swami took pity and asked him to leave the child in his house. The girl survived and the Swami looked after her from that time onwards. When the district government officials came and inspected the house, instead of a samadhi, they had darshan of Mother Durga, bedecked and with four arms. The officials returned, firmly convinced that Siva and Parvati themselves were living in the village Palakonda. They prostrated to the Swami and returned. Many villagers began developing great devotion towards the Swami. The Swami taught his disciples secrets of Panchikarana, subtle, gross and causal bodies, the six centers of energy (the shatchakra), the nature of time, the features of the four ashramas and the methodology of Pranayama.

After some time, the Swami decided to propagate Sanatana Dharma all over the country and therefore decided to travel all over the country. He got Bhramaramba, his brother's daughter whom he brought up, married and entrusted the house to Veerayya and Somulu. He made arrangements for daily worship at the samadhi of Annapumamma and in

the temple of Ramalingeswara and left Palakonda. Wherever he went, people who had already heard of his great divine powers, represented to him their desires, their difficulties and their troubles and used to get solutions for them. The Swami visited Bobbili, Saluru, Mandasa, Barua, Sri Koormam, Srikakulam, Arasavilli and other places and reached Vizianagaram. In the contonment area in Vizianagaram, he built a cottage and started living there. There the Swami gave discourses on the Nine Modes of Devotion and Modes of Worship. Many soldiers and officers of the Army became his disciples. The Vizianagar ruler Ananda Gajapati (1850-1897) came one day and listened to the Swami's discourses. What he heard from others about the Swami got confirmed. He honored him by making him the Silpacharya, the Professor of Architecture of his dominion. But the court pandits did not like the Swami's figure and his attire and even his behaviour. Moreover, they found that the Swami never rose from his seat when the ruler arrived at the darbar, but continued to sit in his seat. He used to bless the Raja while continuing to sit. The pandits then represented to their ruler that this behaviour was clearly a violation of the convention usually observed at a royal court. When asked, the Swami said that no human being can bear to receive his namaskar. When he was asked to show proof for such wild statement, he asked for a big stone (boulder) to be brought to him, which was done accordingly. The Swami then got up and did namaskar to the stone. Immediately with sounds, the stone was broken into pieces. This was an eyeopener to the pandits attached to the royal court. However, some pandits ascribed this to his black magic. To test him further, they spread some thorny seeds, secretly, on his seat in the court. The Swami transformed them into Jasmine flowers and sat as usual, thus teaching a needed lesson to the pandits.

Ghanta Sitappa, a devotee of the Swami, lived in a village called Devulapalli in the Sringarvarapukota taluk of Vijayanagar samsthan. He was a weaver, as also a great poet. Since he was not able to pay the revenue tax, as a result of drought conditions, the officials of the Raja imprisoned and kept him in jail. He then prayed to the Swami and the

Swami appeared there. The locks of the jail gave way. The officials and the people who witnessed this miracle surrendered to the Swami as his devotees. After releasing Sitappa, the Swami began his return journey. On the way, in a village called Konithi, the Swami initiated one Karri Latchayya, who was a disciple of Sitappa as also a poet, into the Mrityunjaya Mantra. After this the Swami returned to Vizianagaram. The Avadhuta stayed for a month, along with the Vizianagaram ruler, in the guest house at Elagonda. He taught the ruler the practice of Raja Yoga in detail. One shepherd boy who listened to the Swami's discourses in secret, became an adept in the practice of Kumbhaka Pranayama. At the request of the listeners and devotees who gathered there, the Swami told them the results of the actions we do in the past lives.

When the Swami was living in Chengalraopet of Visakhapatnam a scholar belonging to the same caste as the Swami's gave him some gold for making into beads. Obviously the scholar - G. Ammanna Sastri wanted to slight the Swami. The omniscient Swami, knowing his real motive, took the gold into his hand and sprinkled some drops of the sanctified water kept in his Kamandalu. Instantly the gold transformed itself into the beads that the miscreant Sastri wanted. The Swami thus cut at the pride of that man. Once one Reddy who belonged to Rayavaam abused the Swami. Not only did he abuse, he came to beat the Swami, and raised his hand. The Swami cursed him and, strangely, removed the curse which hung on his pet parrot. Similarly, the Swami stopped the killings in the village perpetrated by the village Goddess. This happened in Daksharama. From there he went to Rajahmundry. He built a cottage at Kotilingala Ghat and did intense tapas for a long time. In his free time he gave discourses on Vedanta philosophy and began writing a book called *Sanari Visweswara Samvadam*. During that period the Pushkara event (celebrated every twelve years) of the Godavari river occurred. Ananda Gajapati the ruler of Vizianagaram came to Rajahmundiy at that time and hearing about the great significance of Pushkara saw the sacred waters of the Godavari at the place indicated by the Swami. The Swami also sprinkled the drops of the sacred water of the Godavari river on the

king and purified him. The Tehsildar of Rajahmundry was an arrogant man and in some context, he got irritated and raised his hand to slap the Swami. The Swami froze him for 12 hours in that very same posture and his arrogance was humbled. He also showed his alchemical powers to the goldsmiths there who requested him to show those powers,. He ate pieces of nine types of pashanas (arsenics) like pieces of jaggery, digested them and when he urinated on a copper plate it turned into gold. He gifted Chilakalapudi Rajalingachari of Gauripalli village with a book entitled *Gothraadhyaya*. He completed *Sanari Visweswara Samvada* and after 12 years left Rajahmundry, and proceeded to Madras to get his book printed.

The Avadhuta Swami worshipped goddess Kanakadurga at Vijayawada staying there for a fortnight. During that period a destitute lady belonging to his own caste used to serve him food. He took pity on her pitiable condition and before leaving Vijayawada he asked her to dig beneath the earth on which she cooked for him. There she found a copper vessel filled fully with gold coins varahas. In one context, he stopped a non-stop mail train at Ponnur by a mere glance. When the English driver came down from the train and did namaskar to the Swami, it started moving again.

In the Siva temple at Kandukur, the priest did not allow a local devotee Ishwarachari to perform abhisheka in the sanctum sanctorum. He came and asked the Swami to help him. The Swami asked Ishwarachari to stand at the dhvajasthambha, the pillar at the entrance, and began reciting hymns and mantra's praising Siva. The Sivalinga started moving from the sanctum sanctorum and stood firmly at the pillar. Ishwarachari did abhisheka. Then the Swami made Ishwarachari himself install the linga back in the sanctum sanctorum. The priest and the trustees of the temple fell at the Swamij's feet. The Swami was taken out in the streets of Nellore town with all honour as Siva Himself. He was worshipped by a devout couple by name Hymavathi and Sarweswara Reddy. The Swami granted the boon of life to Sarveswara Reddy.

The Swami reached Madras and in the beginning stayed for ten days in the house of a potter. Then he changed to Mudaliar Choultry. Kanchi Doraiswami Mudaliar was suffering from leprosy. The Swami assured him that if he gets his book *Sanari Visweswara Samvada* printed, he would be cured of leprosy. He asked him to drink water, mixing it with Vibhuti which he gave him imbued with magical powers. By the time the printing of the book was over, Mudaliar regained his normal health and was cured of the dreaded disease. This made the Swami a celebrated yogi in Madras. The book was printed for the first time in 1901. It is said that this book is of inestimable value to Siddha Vaidyas and the Swami dealt with other areas such as Mantra, Laya, Hatha, Raja, Swara Chayapurusha and Maharaja schools of yoga. This was written keeping in view of another famous Vedantic text *Sita Rama Anjaneya Samvada* (of Parasuramapantula Lingamurti) and it also contains valuable information about cures for diseases which yoga practitioners are likely to get. According to *Advaita Sudhanidhi* a book written by Pattisapu Venkateswarlu Viswanadhavadhuta was a disciple of Shankarananda. When the Swami was living in Rajahmundry, it is said that, Reddy Subrahmanyam, Tanikella Seshayya, Mantena Venkataratnam, Tippavajhala Narasimha Sastri Rajayogi, Kasibhatla Brahmayya Sastri and other leading lights of the day were his disciples.

Thousands of people used to come to hear Swami's discourses in Madras. There a very important incident happened. One day the Swami was being taken out in procession as a mark of great respect to his eminence. When the procession reached the High Court area, another procession for Sringeri Jagadguru came in the opposite direction. The Swami entered into discussion with Jagadguru and through winning the debate he appeared radiant as Sankara Himself. The Swami declared, in moment of revelation, that he was Gaurinatha (Siva) Himself. Then when the Sringeri Acharya asked him where his Gauri (Parvati) was, the Swami cried "Gauri!" at the top of his voice. Then the daughter of a Chettiyar **who was** coming with the Swami's procession, approached the Swami, folding her hands with reverence. The Swami seated her on his left thigh.

She shone like Parvati Herself in great splendour. It is this very posture of the Swami and his Gauri that is being printed on the Swami's book. The devotees of Sringeri Swami now asked him to show his Third Eye. Then Viswanadhavaduta asked his disciples to place stacks of fodder on the sea-shore at one place and then opened his third eye. Then the fodder stacks caught fire and were reduced to ash. Then the Jagadguru and his followers accepted the Swami's greatness unequivocally. Then, at Gauridevi's supplication, the Swami explained the qualities of a guru. Gauridevi herself gave a discourse on Rajyoga. She revealed the details about her former birth, her marriage with Viswanadhayya, giving up her body in the yogic way and also told how after 18 years she could meet her Lord again there at that place. After revealing all these details, she vanished. At the devotee's request the Swami recited to them, besides Veerabrahma's Kalajnanam, the verses he himself composed as his *Kalajnana*.

The Swami left Madras after some time and on the way visited the Math belonging to Veerbrahmam. He left his danda (stick) and Kamandalu in that place. He moved onward from there, and on 23.10.1914 (Friday, Kartik month, Shuddha Panchami) he disappeared in the cave of the Badarikavana in Srisailam. They say that he is alive to this day. He gives his darshan, quite often, on Friday to devotees full of faith in him. They say that such darshans are taking place in the Durga temple at Palakonda.

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27. BRHMANANDA SARASWATI SWAMI

(1863-1938)

The 19th century was a critical period in the history of India. Subject to colonial rule as well as victimised by internal rivalries of dissensions and differences based on selfishness, India presented a pitiable picture of decay. During that critical period great saints and sages appeared who valiantly rescued the spiritual heritage of India from imminent decay. Through their writings, their discourses and their pilgrimages through the length and breadth of the country, these great masters changed the spiritual consciousness of people. Brahmananda Saraswati Swami was one among them. During the last phase of the nineteenth century and the first three decades of the twentieth century, he was the most distinguished among those who spread the spiritual tradition of Dattatreya yoga and the related modes of worship among people.

On 27-9-1863, a male child was born to a Brahmin couple Govindaraju Raghavayya and Tirumalamba living in Patamata village of Vijayawada taluk of Krishna District. Since they belonged originally to Mangalagiri, they named their son after the famous God of that village Panakalaswami SgSF (a form of Lord Narasimha), as "Panakalu". At the age of eight the boy was adopted by Govindaraju Sitamma and Narsimha Rao belonging to Yanamalakuduru. This was in 1871. The adopted parents called him Ramappa. That very year Ramappa's thread ceremony was performed. Since Sitamma's parents belonged to the Vadlamannati family living in Machilipatnam (Bandar), Ramappa stayed with his uncles there and studied upto Matriculation, (today's tenth class). In 1875 Ramappa married Janakamma. He took up the job of inspector of boilers. Since he was born in a pious, God-fearing family of faith and devotion and brought up in such an atmosphere, which was further strengthened by inherited spiritual tendencies, samskaras, Ramappa developed great interest in the worship of God. He also developed tremendous charitable disposition as a result of hearing a discourse by a non-Hindu teacher, emphasizing the fact that only those who do good to others bearing all difficulties without

flinching acquire merit and permanent name and fame. Moreover, since he was gifted by natural, unquestioning faith by birth, he used to recite several mantras and stotras such as Gayatri, Sivapanchakshari, Ramashadakshari, Balashadakshari, Narayanakshari, Vasudeva Dwadasakshari Hanumatdwadasakshari, Nrisimhashtakshari, and Sri Panchadasi. In 1883 (Swabhanu year) a son was born to him. While Ramappa in this way was leading an exemplary wordly and spiritual life an unbearable calamity struck him in the form of the death of his parents first and later his wife and son.

The wise say that affluence gives joy to the body and adversity gives good counsel to the Self (Atman). As a result of these calamities, the seed of renunciation began sprouting in Ramappa's inner being. Though friends and relatives advised him to get remarried, his consciousness inclined towards mantra and japa and body longed to go on pilgrimages. As a result he travelled all over the country from Kanyakumari to Himalayas and from Dwaraka to Puri Jagannath and all other sacred places made holy by untold number of years. He also, during these travels, performed rites to his departed parents and wife and son, absolving himself from their debt. During his pilgrimages, he got the acquaintance of a Bawaji in Srisailam. He told him about the benefits that accrue from doing service to good people. The message of Bawaji that we should see only the good qualities in people, even in the wicked ones struck deep root in Ramappa's consciousness. He implemented this advice and served saintly people and received their blessings. Whatever mantra they gave him, he used to do japa of that mantra. At this stage, he had darshan of a Gauda sage. He elicited all information about what Ramappa was doing. He told him that the mind will not achieve stability if its energy is diffused in the japa of too many mantras. He then explained to him the mystery of the Trinity of Gods (Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara) and directed him to worship Dattatreya. He narrated the story of *Guru Charitra* and initiated him with Dattatreya mantra. Ramappa became a worshipper of Dattatreya from that time onwards. He again started visiting various pilgrim centers. He had darshan of Vasudevananda Saraswati Swami,

the foremost practitioner of Datta tradition, frequently in Vijayawada. Because of his travels all over, his attachment to his family lessened and roaming reduced his egoism. He developed patience since he had to eat whatever he got and had to practice no distinction about the giver. As a result of his encounter with many saints and sages, he learnt many secrets and subtleties of spiritual life, the education of the spirit. He developed an intense longing to take sanyasa. God, who is ever ready to fulfil his devotee's desires, fulfilled Ramappa's longing. A great Dravidian sage byname Sri Satchidananda Saraswati gave him sanyasa and named him, after the conventions of sanyasa, Brahmananda Saraswati. It was the year 1895 and he was 32 years old.

After taking sanyas, the Swami travelled to the Himalayas again. He did tapas in Muktinathkshetra in Nepal. The intensity of the tapas weakened his body. He then decided that direct experience of the Self can be had only by practice of nididhyasana, concentration and meditations. For restraining the mental modifications and making it stable and one- pointed, he felt that the practice of Hatha Yoga was the only way. With that determination he did the prescribed bodily exercises. They were so severe that blood oozed through his faeces and urine. Even then he did not stop the exercises. He underwent the practices of Pranayama under the direction of Sri Narayandas Balaji who lived in Rahuri of Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra. He also served a great Vairagi in the Naimisaranya area. The sage taught him that he can eat a little to appease his hunger and renounce all other things. He should remain detached until *all the* past karmas are burnt out. The sage told him, further, that he should endure the body until he achieves total detachment. Enquiry into Brahman, he told him, is the only aim of life. The Swami returned to Sringeri absorbing in his consciousness all that the sage told him. He stayed in Sringeri and in the presence of the Jagadguru, Sri Satchidananda Sivabhinava Nrisimha Bharati Swami (1879-1912) listened to the Bhashya(s). Later on he sought the guidance of the celebrated sage of the Dattatreya tradition, Sri Vasudevananda Saraswati Swami (Tembe Swami) (1854 -1914). This Swami was famous as the author of

Dattabhavasudharasa Datta Samhita, Dattatreya Dakarasaha- sranamavali and other books. Vasudevananda was born in Mangaon in Maharashtra and passed way in Garudeshwar in Gujarat. He is mentioned in Shirdi Sai Baba's life histoiy and that of Mauna Swami. Tembe Swami visited Andhra also between 1908-1910. Brahmananda requested him to install the image of Dattatreya and his padukas in the Sankar Math in Rajahmundiy, (1908). At the behest of Sringeri Jagadguru Tembe Swami gave his writings (*Datta Mahatmya, Guru Charitra*, etc.) to Brahmananda and requested him to read them out to the Jagadguru. Like Mauna Swami, Brahmananda, too, learnt the subtleties of sastras and yoga practices and attained many siddhis such as Ritambhara Prajna. While staying in Kashi, at the request of Mauna Swami, Brahmananda Saraswati Swami sent the statue of Dattatreya and his padukas, made with Jaipur marble, to be installed at the Math in Kurtalam. At the request of Brahmananda Saraswati Swami, Mauna Swami lifted the huge statue of Adi Sankara to its original position from which it was bent and got it installed properly again in the Panchavati Mandir. Brahmananda was five years older than Mauna Swami.

The Sadhana that Brahmananda did so far was for his own salvation. After achieving that, he struggled for uplifting society and propagated Sanatana Dharma through the length and breadth of India. The Swami gave sanyas to 32 people and gave initiation to 600 aspirants. He gave discourses in Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Marthi and Hindi on Hindu dharma and moulded lakhs of people in a way to make them achieve Self- knowledge. He got Dattatreya's picture along with the mantra "Sri Dattassaranam mama" printed and distributed among devotees. He used to ask woman devotees to give him akshata (sacred grains of rice dipped in turmeric). For the sake of devotees he got many yoga texts and books on devotion printed and distributed among people. Among these, mention may be made of *Srisivaayutha namavali, Sri Dattabhavasudharasa*. The Swami himself wrote, *Swabodha Darpana* (Self - Instructor) *Yogaphalapradarshini* and *Yogabhyasa Darpana* in Telugu and some other works in Hindi and Sanskrit, notably 108 slokas with the mantra

“Sri Dattaha Saranam Mama” in Sanskrit. These books contain invaluable and comprehensive hints about the various aspects of yoga, both Hatha and Raja, as well as other aspects of sadhana.

There are many good works that Brahmananda Swami did for the renaissance of Hinduism and its propagation. He got the Math in Hardw renovated and made permanent arrangements for its activities. He inst the image and sacred padukas of SriNarasimha Saraswati Swami (1369- 1459) in Karanja city and established also a choulty there. Among the places he installed either the image of Dattatreya or his padukas, menti should be made of Badari, Kedar and Rajahmundry, Nellore, and Banda the Pachagangeswara Math in Kashi, Gaya and Pandhari, Manikgaon, Garudeshwar etc. Gayatri, Sarada or Sankara images were also installed in some of these places. On 26.1.1907, Saturday, Sankara, Sarada and Dattatreya images were installed in Nellore. In Nellore, Balijepali Kaveramma gave land on 23-6-1907 for the Swami's Math. The images of Gayatri, Sankara and Dattatreya to be found in Bandar (Masulipatam were installed by the Swami himself. In Kashi, installation of Yajnavalky and Hanuman were done at different places. He provided enough funds for the various activities in these places and installed working committ e and trustees. At Karanja alone he instituted a trust with 60,000 rupees. Though the performance of Yajna and Yagas require huge funds, the S w earned the support of the rulers of Kashmir, Nepal and Jataprolu as we I that of the queens of Indur, and Kollapur. Many millionaires also suppor the Swami'sgoodworks, either incashorkind. Govindaraju Srinivasarao, the trusted lieutenant, so to say, of the Swami gave huge donations when the Swami needed them. Countless are the people who did padapoojat o the Swami and offered him money, gold, various things, etc.

After installing Datta image in Nellore, Brahmananda left Andhra and reached the Sringeri Math in the Kshemeswara Ghat area in Kashi. A large part of the Math was occupied by some merchants of Kashi. The Swami conveyed this news to the Sringeri Jagadguru by telegram. The Jagadguru sent a message, this also by telegram, authorising him to take necessary legal action to free the place from illegal occupation. The

Swami, by his austere living on the banks of the Ganga, achieved great reputation as a genuine yogi from the people living in that area. This enabled him to get their unstinted cooperation and support and within 15 days he got the Math freed from illegal occupation by merchants and influential but corrupt, gentry. He revived the glory of the Math and all this is due only to his yogic powers and nothing else. Consequently, the Swami achieved tremendous recognition as a great sage. He continued to stay in the Sankara Math but, after some time, with the help of rich devotees and disciples from Bombay he established the Panchalingeswara Math in Bindu Madhava Ghat and shifted there perhaps in 1925. He attained Mahasamadhi there itself on Friday, 2.12.1938. As per the injunctions of the scriptures, his body was taken in procession from Bindu Madhava Ghat to Manikamika Ghat. It was taken in a boat to the middle of the Ganga and laid to rest in its sacred waters. The marble statue of the Swami which we see in the Math now is one the famous scholar and writer Vennelakanti Hanumayamma (1875-1937) got installed. I visited the Math on 3.5.1997. This is near the Trailingaswami's Math.

Let me now cite some miracles performed by the Swami. A Gujarathi brahmachari called Ganda Maharaj lived with Sri Vasudevananda Saraswati. After taking Sanyas he became well known as Yogananda Saraswati. Two days before Vasudevananda passed away, Brahmananda Swami appeared in a dream to Ganda Maharaj telling him that he was starting for Gurudeshwar and after reaching all the needful things will be done under his (the Swami's) personal supervision. The next day he reached Garudeshwar, to the presence of his guru. Where is Kashi!! and where is Garudeshwar!! Such a long distance. When they were thinking like this, precisely at that moment Vidyananda Tirtha arrived and told them that Brahmananda Swami appeared in a dream to him and ordered him to come there. All the disciples gathered and on Ashadha Shuddha vidiya of Ananda year 1914, they gave to their guru a watery cremation observing all the formalities. When all of them were going back to their respective places, Ganda Mahraj with 14 kerosene tins containing gold coins, and 18 kerosene tins containing

silver rupee coins and saying that it was Vasudevananda Swami's order, handed them over to Brahmananda Saraswati. Vidyananda, Ganda Maharaj and Brahmananda, after discussing among themselves, decided to spend the money for the construction of Maths at Ganagapur, Kurugadda, Garudeshwar, Mangaon, Haridwar and Badarinath. They also spent some amount for renovation purposes.

Around 1903 the train in which Brahmananda Swami was travelling in the Nizam state, suddenly stopped in the middle. Though the driver- an Englishman tried desperately, there was no change. The Swami got off his compartment and with his staff and Kamandalu walked to the engine and asked the driver what the problem was. The arrogant English driver abused him: "Go away you fool! You unsuccessful dirty man! How dare a monk ask me?" Unperturbed the Swami replied: "Yes, yes you are correct. I am a lesser fool. Don't you see you alone are unsuccessful now. Yes, I am a monk but not a monkey like you. You come down first with your fireman." The driver was surprised at this English-speaking monk and got off the engine with his assistant. The Swami got into the engine, examined it for a minute, touched a spot in the engine and climbed down. Then he told the driver, "the monk has set right the fault. Let the monkey now carry on." The driver asked the passengers to get off the train and sent word to the guard to come there. But the guard did not come. The driver sent his assistant to bring the guard. When he went there he saw a strange sight; in place of the guard the Swami was sitting. In a state of absolute absorption. The driver ran to the Swami and praised him thus: "Jesus in India! I am fortunate. I have seen with my own eyes." And addressing the passengers who gathered there he exhorted them to join him and say, "Three cheers to the monk Christ!" With big shouts of joy the train reached the destination. This miracle was narrated by the Swami to his disciple Velagapudi Ramachandra Rao which was heard by his son Sundara Rama Dutt.

Once there was curfew in Ahmedabad for three days. It so happened that the Swami arrived there in the middle of the night, got off the train and was walking alone in the streets. The police saw him, arrested him

and kept him in the jail. Around 1.30 in the night the Swami appeared in a dream to the wife of the subinspector of that police station. She woke up her husband and told him that a Swami was in his station, arrested by the police. The husband went on sleeping, without bothering about his wife's information. But when he also saw the Swami, he got up, went to the station on his horse, released the Swami and with profuse apologies brought the Swami to his own residence. Next morning he worshipped the Swami with due respect. The couple had everything but was issueless. The Swami initiated the wife with the Dattatreya mantra. After a year she gave birth to a beautiful male child. They named their son as Datta Brahmananda Mooley. The subinspector got promotions to higher positions very soon. At the age of 50 he took voluntary retirement and took sanyas from the Swami and became famous as Jnanananda Saraswati.

One day Brahmananda Saraswati Swami stood before the house of the sub-judge in Bellary around 11 o' clock in the morning and said : "Mother! Give me alms!" Hearing the judge with uncontrollable anger told his servants: "Catch this lazy lubber by the scruff of his neck and hurl him a mile away from here!" The Swami remained calm and controlled and said: "The servant is not the proper person. He is not fit. You yourself come the day after tomorrow." Then he moved away. "What arrogance to this beggar!" fumed the judge and went inside. When he was preparing to go to the court, his wife had a severe stomach ache. The doctors tried their best but all in vain. With his anxiety, the judge totally forgot about going to the court. He didn't even send a leave letter. His wife suffered the whole day. The next day he received a telegram from the Madras High Court, suspending him for dereliction of duty. Though he lost his job, and his wife was suffering severe pain, the judge remained unaware of the heinous sin he committed by abusing the Swami. The next day all the records with him were seized by the officials. Now there was no servant and no one even to enquire. A merchant who lived opposite his house saw the judge's misery. He went to him and said: "Sir! This is the result of your arrogance when that Swami asked for some alms on that day!" The sub-judge asked the merchant to accompany him

and together they searched for the Swami. He saw him sitting under a tree in deep contemplation. He caught hold of his holy feet and crying uncontrollably implored him to forgive him for his dreadful misconduct. Many people gathered there. The Swami said, "Don't touch me. After five days, I shall throw you back on your seat!" But the sub-judge refused to leave him. The news spread all over the town. The district judge and other officials arrived and surrounded the Swami. Suddenly, the Swami vanished. They all waited until 9 'o clock in the night and then dispersed. Next morning, when the district judge came to the court at 11 'o clock, in the subjudge court, the Swami appeared sitting in the chair of the judge with the gown on his body. But he vanished instantly. When the judge and other officials went to the tree at 12 'o Clock they saw that the Swami was not there at all. He was finally seen sitting on the railway platform. All of them came and prayed to him. Then the health of the sub-judge's wife was restored to normalcy.

The subjudge was directed to report at the High Court in Madras and he went there, accordingly. The High Court reinstated him in his job. After four months, the Swami visited the subjudge's house and received the honors worthy of him. The subjudge worshipped his feet and the Swami took his food there. Then the Swami told him about the Self-Instructor and its timetable. He gave it to him and asked him to keep a diary of the events that happened everyday right from the moment he got up from the bed until he went to sleep. Before he slept, the Swami asked him to read what he had recorded. He said that things will evolve gradually and he asked him to send the diary leaves to him. The subjudge did everything accordingly, and took sanyas in 1930. The Swami told all this to Tahsildar Ramachandra Rao who was Sundara Rama Datt's father. The Swami, after telling the story of the subjudge, told Ramachandra Rao: "The sub-judge grew in the spiritual field and then had even forsaken me and went away." The photo printed in the Swami's *Yogabhyasa- darpana* is the one taken on the terrace of the house of Sundara Rama Datt in Kavali.

In 1923 the Swami was sixty year old and that year he went to Bombay. There the rich devotees of the Swami competed with each other in worshipping the Swami with proper honours. The Swami was watching their actions. Among them, four devotees left without taking permission from the Swami. The eight disciples who stayed on remained until evening. They requested the Swami to visit their houses so that they could have the opportunity of worshipping his holy feet. The Swami told them that he will visit their houses at 10 'o clock in the morning the next day. The Swami visited the house of each one of these disciples simultaneously and they offered worship to him and gave him bhiksha. Among them were Kolhapur Raja, and Kelkar. This incident recalls the one in the life of Sri Narasimha Saraswati recorded in Chapter 47 of *Sri Guru Charitra* where he performed a similar miracle.

Sri Sundara Rama Dutt worshipped the Padukas of Brahmananda Saraswati Swami everyday. On 2-12-1938 (Bahudhanya Margasira Suddha Dasami) when he took out the Padukas for daily worship as usual, he found that they were infested with white ants. He became worried and feared that something untoward might have happened. On 4.12.1938 he got at 10 'o Clock in the morning a telegram from Kasi informing him that the Swami attained siddhi (passed away) on Dasami. This was an example of his greatness that the Swami showed to his disciple who was very close to him.

We visited Brahmananda Saraswati Swami's Math on 3-5-1997. Whenever we go to Nellore, we meet Sri Sundara Rama Dutt, who is 95 years old (2005).

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28. MASTER C.V.V. (1868-1922)

Bhagavan Sri Krishna says in the *Bhagavad Gita* that the ancient yoga teaching he taught the Sun God - Surya - in turn taught it to his son, Manu, and Manu taught it in his turn to his son Ishwaku. But, that ancient teaching which was inherited by Rajarshis over time in due course was forgotten and Sri Krishna says to Arjuna. "I am teaching that ancient yogavidya to you" Now in 3rd century B.C. it was this ancient teaching that Patanjali collated and expounded in the sutra form in his *Yoga Sutras*. On the basis of those sutras many great yogis taught yoga in accordance with the times in the form of various paths. The followers of this are found not only in India but also in foreign countries. During the last years of the first decade of the 20th century, Master C.V.V. taught this yoga giving it a new orientation. It is called Bhrikarahita Taraka Raja yoga. Hitherto for attaining moksha, liberation, or realization of Brahman yogis practiced yoga in their own individual way. Everything that is born of Brahman is to be Brahman Itself! Master C.V.V.'s attempt was to remove the obstacles to such a realisation. It means revising the sequence of Creation, Maintenance and Dissolution. This was master C.V.V.'s great achievement.

During the Vijayanagar empire, many families from Andhra migrated to Tamilnadu. Such families are to be found in Kumbhakonam and the surrounding villages. During the 19th century, in a place called Ammarsatram near Kumbhakonam there lived a Brahmin niyogi couple, Kamamma and Kuppuswami. Kuppuswami worked as the manager of the choultry in that village and from that income looked after the needs of his family. He had two sisters by names Subbamma and Dharmamba. Kuppuswami performed the marriage of Subbamma with Venkatrao, son of landlord and the munsif of Kumbhakaonam, Kanchupati Ranga Rao. And Dharmamba was married to his own brother-in-law. The Kumbhakonam munsif was a man of great spiritual strength and performed intense tapas. His wife Ammannamma was a devoted, pious

lady and totally dedicated to the service of her husband. They looked after their daughter-in-law with more affection than what they would have shown to their daughter. Subbamma adored her brother and sister-in-law. Then Kamamma's delivery days arrived. Since Ammarsatram was a tiny village, Ammannamma and Ranga Rao brought Kamamma for delivery to Kumbhakonam itself. During intense meditation, Ranga Rao realised that a child endowed with exceptional divine qualities would be born in the family. On 4-8-1868 Kamamma gave birth to a son who was destined to become a Great Master, a prophet of the new Age. Ranga Rao himself named the boy as Venkaswami. After the lapse of some years Ranga Rao, ripe with knowledge and renunciation left home and went on his own quest, as it were. The burden of looking after the family fell on Venkat Rao. Since they had properties in Srirangam also, they lived for some time in Srirangam.

Venkaswami was growing up with his parents in Ammarsatam. Kuppuswami performed Venkaswami's thread ceremony and aksharabhyas ceremony at the age of five itself. Kuppuswami fondly hoped that he should give English education to his son and make him achieve distinction in life. But Subbamma's husband suddenly died and since they did not have children, she asked that Venkaswami be given as her adopted child. Venkaswami's parents thought that their son would enjoy all comforts of the rich if given in adoption and would be able to lead a life wherein he would achieve his full potential. Therefore, they acceded to Subbamma's wish. Now, in the changed situation, the surname was Kanchupati, adopted father was Venkat Rao, his own name Venkaswami, and the grand father's title was Rao. All these combined to call him Kanchupati Venkata Venkaswami Rao. The young boy became famous as C.V.V.

Subbamma was quite rich but quite alone and there was no male member. Therefore, to help his sister Kuppuswami left his village Ammarsatram, and bought the first house beside his sister's house in Dabir street of Kumbhakonam and lived there. Venkaswami learnt Telugu, and Tamil in a "Street school" and Sanskrit was taught by

Subbamma. After that, he joined a regular school and with his extraordinary intelligence exceeding his age, he learnt all that is to be learnt in no time. The brother-in-law of Venkat Rao's sister lived in Srirangam. Rukmini was their daughter. At her very birth, they decided that Venkaswami would be her husband. According to custom, they performed their marriage. Rukmini was 8 years old and Venkaswami 12 years old studying in the high school. At the age of 14 Venkaswami passed the Matric exam with first rank in order of merit. Then he studied Intermediate in Srirangam. The sons of the zamindars of Srirangam and Pudukkota were Venkaswami's class fellows. In those days, studying Intermediate itself was a great achievement. For degree studies one had to go to Madras. But the two mothers and the father Kuppaswami were not in favour of Venkaswami going to Madras for studies. Thus the son's study was discontinued. Staying at home, Venkaswami started studying spiritual books. He realised the essence of all education.

In the year 1886, Rukmini, now a young woman, came to live with her husband. Their married life was spent peacefully. They enjoyed affluence, respect and renown, the friendship and influence of the zamindars of the area and, above all, they spent time in the study of Theosophical books. During the last week of December 1886, Venkaswami went to Madras, along with friends, to attend the annual convention of the Theosophical Society held under the auspices of Colonel Olcott. Thus he made acquaintance of the sages and saints from various countries. Venkaswami was highly impressed by the lectures of T. Subba Rao who hailed from the Godavari districts and he made friendship with him. Through him he was introduced to Madame Blavatsky. When Venkaswami did meditation along with her, he attained the state of samadhi. Ever since that experience, he deepened his sadhana, even while living the householder's life outwardly. In 1888, he had his first issue whom he named, after his adopted father, Venkata Rao. That very year Venkaswami, became the president of the Kumbhakonam Municipality. Venkaswami who exemplified the fine balance between controlled enjoyment and interior perfection of yoga found that Madame Blavatsky appeared in his meditation

When a girl child was born in 1893, in memory of his grandmother, they called her Ammaniamma. When another girl-child was born in 1894, he gave her the name of his own mother, Kamamma. When Venkaswami gave up his position as president of Municipality and went in for a railway contract job, he sustained heavy losses and had to sell his properties. Meanwhile in 1896 Venkamma and in 1903 Krishnamurti were born. In 1904 Rukminamma gave birth to another son and passed away soon. Venkaswami was 36 years old at that time. He married again (1906) the 14 year-old Venkamma, Daughter of Madduri Subbamma who came away from Kanchi and settled down in Madras. The second marriage was celebrated in Tirumala. At the time of marriage the priest shows formally, the usually invisible Arundhati star to the newly-married couple. But Venkaswami pressed the middle of the priests eyes and made him really see the Arundhati star in the sky. That day itself they realised that Venkaswami was a man born with a specific cause. The householder's life with Venkamma helped Venkaswami evolve into a great master with occult powers. It is said Madame Blavatsky herself was born as Venkamma.

With the companionship of Venkamma, Venkaswami brought the experience of Brahman consciousness into himself and achieved overlordship on his gross, and subtle bodies and their strategies. This lordship enabled him to become a world teacher. His impact fell on Venkamma herself. He set right her gross, subtle and causal bodies, released her intuitive intelligence and made her speak through her mouth, the scientific elements imbedded in the different Koshas. (Sheaths). He preserved these revelation in books. He observed the evolution of the intuitive intelligence of humanity and prepared a plan for its spiritual evolution. When the Hailey's comet was travelling over the earth in 1908, Venkaswami invoked and absorbed that power into his body. He had the experience that he was himself the supreme Reality, Parabrahma. He learnt all the powers of gaseous state which coming from Brahman is responsible for every atom to evolve through the births as a tree, an animal and the human being. Before birth, human beings enter the

purursha, in the form of an atom and after three months enter the woman womb. Without allowing the gross intuitive intelligence (Sthula Prajna) to atrophy, Venkaswami separated the subtle form taking shape in himself the production of the cell, and dotpatthi from it and preventing the impact of the nine planets - the navagrahas, he introduced that egg (anda) into Venkamma's womb. Everyday, at the time of prayer, he got the subtle body from the gross body and with the influence of the coiled serpent- Kundalini - infused power (Shakti) into the egg (anda). After nine months on 13-4-1909, a child the embodiment of Brahman, was born. He was given the name "Chandu".

Like other children, Chandu did not cry or sleep. When he was only one month old, he started talking and with faltering steps used to enter the room where his father performed his yoga practice and sit on his lap Venkaswami used to take butter milk to cool his body heated by yogic practices. Chandu, sitting on his father's lap used to drink this butter mil so that the father got another cup for himself. One day Venkamma and her mother saw the father and son drinking buttermilk secretly. Immediately Chandu gave back the glass to his father. Chandu used to predict the future of visitors who came to see his father. Chandu was merely four months old at that time. He made his grandfather Kuppuswami come out of his atheistic stance and making him sit, the six year old Chandu gave him the sacred thread and made him do sandhyavandana Like Master C.V.V. Chandu also was born with a purpose. Just as he talked to his father in a mystical manner about occult matters, in the same vein he used to converse with sages who appeared with divine bodies. Not knowing this, Subbamma got frightened and ran away to Madras. When Chandu was ten months old, he taught his father a new mantra called MTA. After a week, he gave him another mantra, and again another after another week. He made his father practice these mantras, he showed his father a new basis and requesting him to show a new light to humanity through that mantra, he passed away. . Venkaswami resurrected him and gave him a new life with his mantric power. But Chandu died 24 times and all the 24 times, Venkaswami by using his

Yogic powers made him alive for all the twenty four hours. In this way he used his yogic power. After this he ordered that “prana” should be brought from the field of “plenty of Prana” in the subtle body of Venkamma. Venkamma entered that field of energy but since powers of maya stopped her journey, she remained there in a trance. Then Venkaswami made Sundaram, a relative, the medium to bring back Prana and then made Chandu alive again. But Chandu told his father that if he were to live on earth, creation would come to a stand still. To discharge the responsibility entrusted to him he left the physical body on 10.6.1910.

In 1910 when Venkaswami was doing aprakrita sadhana in his room, in the middle of the night, the light in the tail of Hailey's comet entered his body making the sound of a thunder. From that time onwards, all those who had his darshan (seeing) and sparshan (touching) came under the spell of his divine attractions. According to the plan he forced, Venkaswami roused the Kundalini power of fellow men and making it a cumulative force, went ahead to correlate the planet earth with this Kundalini power. Making those who had necessary qualification as the mediums, he initiated them on 29.5.1910 with CVV as the mantra. From that time onwards this was a festive day for his followers. They call it the “May call Day”. The Master first initiated the members of his family and then his relatives and then others. The world recognised him as Master C.V.V. “Master” means “an authority” or a “Siddha Purusha”. Countless are the miracles that master C.V.V. performed with his yogic powers. Here are some.

Once when he was in a state of deep meditation a sound emanated from him like that of rice being pounded. For three months, it emanated from him for all the twenty-four hours without a break. No one knew how and from where that sound came. The reason was the tuning of the sound waves in the sky with his programme, his project. When the Master walked, many who saw him became ecstatic, some forgot their jobs, and some simply stood, rooted to the spot. One day he inhaled air through one aperture of the nose for six hours uninterruptedly, and then for another six continuous hours he exhaled it. And for six more hours he remained

suspending his breath. His body became light as a whiff of cotton and rose in the air. In the year 1911, his grandchild (Venkata Rao's son), aged one and a half years while playing ate a toy made with clay and died. Venkat Rao ran to his father holding the child in his hands. Master C.V.V. handed over the dead body of the child to Venkamma and asked all those present to move to a distance. The Master sat at a distance in samadhi and doing the treatment of "supply of prana", infused life into the child. The waste in the child's stomach gushed out. Kuppuswami who saw all this, fell at the feet of the Master saying: "You are God Himself. There is no other God beyond you." He then implored the Master to teach him yoga and bless him with liberation, moksha. All atheistic ideas in him were shattered. Subbamma, the Master's adopted mother, took bath one day in the river Kaveri and fell unconscious on the banks of the river. Within minutes she died. The Master and Venkamma were in Yogic practices at that time. Therefore, the people there carried the dead body to their place. But the Master who was to do funeral rites to her, said that she would regain life after 16 days. He also said that she still had three years span of life and told them to protect the body from the ants and worms which generally invade a corpse. The Master then left for the nuptial ceremony of his nephew at Bhagavatapuram. Though they tried their best, ants and worms invaded the body. However, as the Master predicted, after 16 days she woke up as if from deep sleep and lived, as foretold, for three more years.

The Master performed many such miracles. He predicted the past, present and future of many people the moment he glanced at them. When new seekers for initiation came, he used to send Venkamma or some other person into trance and make them tell details about their past life and their present responsibilities. All these details were inscribed into a book. The Master himself entered the planets and through his experiences thereof, he used to gather relevant information and the related mantra all of which were recorded in books. During the last days he rectified the movement of Saturn. While he was engaged in such a study of Venus planet, he had to give up his physical body. Therefore, he said that he will

transmit the information obtained by his research through his followers. The Master once revealed that the Lunar Field will expand and will move back for a stretch of ten miles. After six months the prediction came true. This matter was confirmed by modern astronomers. He revealed further that the earth is curved and for this reason sunlight was not falling properly on the moon. It is for this reason that we get Bahula Paksha dark fortnight. Once the curved nature is removed, there will always be a full moon. The modern astronomers confirm that the earth is curved for two hundred miles length.

The new yoga tradition established by C.V.V. is called Bhruktarahita Taraka Rajayoga. Bhrukta means past Karma. This Raja Yoga means annulling the past Karma by surrender (to the Master) and practicing the yoga. In this yoga there are not many rules and regulations that one finds in other yoga systems. With firm faith, and full surrender one should utter the mantra "C.V.V." three times and closing one's eyes lightly, surrendering the mind and watching the ideas and opinions that surface. This is enough. The past Karmas are thereby purified, emptied and the intelligence which is in the interior transcends its limited nature and achieves interiority of a witness. This is liberation, moksha. This new yoga was, for the first four years, confined to Kumbhakonam. Then it spread to other areas and is now to be found in foreign countries also. When the Master's father Kuppuswami died in 1912, his house was changed into a yoga center by the Master. Since 1914 countless seekers were initiated into the new yoga here and they in turn performed many miracles and spread the new yoga system far and wide. First the members of the Master's family joined as members of this New Yoga path. Then others joined. They are all* called "mediums". Among them mention may be made of the most prominent. R. Radhakrishnayya of Kanchipuram (also known as Satchidananda Saraswati); Srinivasa Chari (Swama yogi) of Tanjavore area; C.R. Srinivasa Aiyar, brother of Dewan C.P. Ramswami Aiyar, Dewan of Travancore; D. Mahadeva Iyer, belonging to Solavandam of Madurai district; Mr. and Mrs. Protaraju Narasimham, Professors of Philosophy

in Chennai; Joshia, Venkatachalapati, Kumbhakonam Sourashtrains Kondi Desiar, Mr. and Mrs. Veturi Prabhakar Sastri, Mynampati Narasimham, lawyer belonging to Ongole (A.P.) and brother of Prakasam Pantulu (late Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh). T.S. Sankara Iyer of Madras Veturi Chandrasekhara Sastri, Narayana Iyer, Velagapudi Subba Rao Pantulu of Bapatla; Tanguturi Janakiram (brother of Tanguturi Prakasam). Mr. and Mrs. Rachakonda Narayanamurti, Vavilikolanu Venkata Ramana Rao, Chennapatnam Padminaabha Modali, Radhakrishna Iyer, N. Raghunathan and others. They learnt the yoga vidya from the Master himself. By 31.1.1922. there were 750 members. Afterwards, through his disciples the new yoga spread all over India as well as in foreign countries. Some who took initiation from C.V.V. became great jnanis; some got rid of worldly troubles.

The in-laws of Ammannamma, the eldest daughter of C.V.V. lived in Madras. Along with her brother Venkat Rao she took initiation. In Madras her house became a well-known center of yoga. One day, when Ammannamma was in a state of Samadhi, she intuitively felt that her father-in-law Krishnaswamayya will die after four days, at 9 'o clock. She overcame her sorrow and informed her father-in-law about this. He was in the pink of health. However, since her prophecies in the past turned out to be true Krishnaswamayya sent a message to his relations and made arrangements for his obsequies. It was customary in those days to place a branch of the coconut tree in the compound, at the entrance. Relations and doctors who came to see made fun of this. But the prophecy came true; he passed away exactly after four days at 9 'O clock. Like Ammannamma, many of the disciples developed the occult power of precognition. The yoga Kendras-centers-in Madras and Kumbhakonam were looked after by, respectively, Ramachandra Rao (Ammannamma's husband) and Venkata Rao (C.V.V.'s eldest son). One day in Kumbhakonam, Krishnamurti (Master's second son) was doing yoga in the presence of his father. The 15-year-old Krishnamurti had a vision in his meditation that the subtle body of his brother-in-law Krishnamurti got separated from his gross body. This was in Madras.

Immediately Krishnamurti came to Madras and informed his sister about this. Ramachandra Rao who was in perfect health suddenly became ill with fever. He also came to know about his condition. He told his wife that he will die, even then he will be with full consciousness. He declined to take any medicine. When, however, Ammannamma got him treated by Tanguturi Janakiram, he failed to find the pulse. When he tried to give an injection, he failed to inject the needle into the body. Ramachandra Rao learnt many divine secrets and secrets of the other world. He told them to the people who visited him and finally gave up the gross body.

Master C.V.V.'s physical form was irresistibly attractive. A delicate body with a golden hue; moustachios which radiated tremendous majesty; tender and soft voice; silk dhothi; a hanky to wipe off the traces of snuff; very expensive watch on the wrist with a golden chain; all these made him shine with a regal splendour as a king of yogis. He used to take very little food but drank many cups of coffee. Many devotees used to gather at the Master's feet for the General call conferences held in the months of May and December (in the last week). The Master used to talk to his yoga disciples and clarify (or rectify) many a yogic facet. In December 1921 General call meeting, the master announced that the work for which he came down to earth was fulfilled. He declared that he was going behind the curtain (giving up the physical body) and exhorted his disciples to spread the yoga far and wide. This depends on the effort that the mediums put forth. At 10 'o clock in the night of 10.5.1922, Master C.V.V. developed hiccups. Both the sons and daughters were away. When Venkamma and Potharaju Narasimham tried to give him medical treatment, the Master refused and passed away. The mediums prayed for the Master; Venkamma prayed to MTA. After one hour, the Master opened his eyes and said, laughing: "Do you at least now, have belief that even after death, I can come back?" After two days, on 12-5-1922, in the evening time, (Dundubhi year, Vaisakha Bahula Padyami, Friday) he voluntarily and freely gave up his body.

The disciples prayed fervently hoping that the Master will come back to life. But the hope was not fulfilled. On the next day the sons performed

the funeral rites. But due to untimely rains, the ash from the body got merged in the river Kaveri. Though he is not before us in the physical form, he is immortal in the form of his New yoga. On 22.5.1922. Venkamma had a darshan of the Master's subtle body.

In his New yoga the Master forged various courses of yoga for seekers. For instance, to ensure the progress of yoga in Sadhana, he formulated E course, of six varieties, 12 courses which have to be done collectively, used to stop the powers of planets some courses; Moreover regulations for stars, angels, rishis, and eclipses were devised. Indeed, he gave shape to 12000 courses which are specially designed with the inputs of "adjustments". It is a vast ocean. After the passing away of the Master, his eldest son C.V. Venkata Rao managed the yoga center. But he died suddenly on 28.5.1924. The center was closed for some time. Until 1931, Potharaju Narasimham ran the yoga center in his house. When he moved to Madras, the center was closed. After some time it was revived by Venkata Chalapathi (N.R.B.V.), D. Mahadeva Iyengar and T.S. Ramanujan who made the center regain its former glory.

It was Venkamma who made the Master's New Yoga and his history comprehensive. Venkamma's parents were Madduri Appayya and Subbamma. She was born on 29.8.1894 and became Master C.V.V.'s second wife in 1906. It was Madame Blavatsky who reincarnated as Venkamma and made Master's New Yoga complete and comprehensive. She played a crucial role in all the yoga activities of the Master. That's the reason for her being described as TN - Trans Medium or the main instrument. Keeping her body and atman under his control, through her as a medium, C.V.V. explored the secrets of the other worlds. Mother spoke Tamil; she knew speaking and writing in Telugu. But she spoke chaste English, fluently, when she became a medium and went into trance. Chandu, Kamala, Manjula, and Bhriktarao were her children. The two sons died very young. After the Master's passing away, Mother remained in a continuous yoga Samadhi state until 1940. After 1940, Mother's stay alternated between the residences of her first daughter Kamala and her husband Krishnaswami in Nagapuram and her second daughter Manjula

and her husband Venugopal in Kumbhakonam. Quite often she visited the houses of devotees in the Andhra region. All the yoga practitioners were her children. During her discourses on yoga she used to reveal many subtleties. Unnava Lakshminarayana, the famous Telugu freedom fighter and pioneering novelist was among the first who received yoga initiation from her. In 1950 when the Mother was in Nagpur, she received a divine message from the Master that she must attend the Kumbh Mela since 100 sages desire to have her darshan. The rishis - sages - came and had the Mother's darshan in the fast moving train, going from Itarsi. This happened at midnight.

According to the instructions of the Master, Mother performed post-funeral rites for elders (parents) in Gaya and Prayaga. Mother led a full life of 65 years practicing yoga and passed away on 16.7.1961. The Master's New Yoga centers are located in Andhra Pradesh at Chittoor, Ongole, Rajahmundry, Warangal, Hanamkonda, Tirupati, Guntur, Tenali, Govada, Nidubrolu, Gurajala, Adoni, Kurnool, Vijayawada, Bapatla, Visakhapatnam, Piduguralla and Hyderabad. For all the followers of his New Yoga his house in Kumbhakonam is a sacred pilgrim place. Master C.V.V.'s works 1. ***Bhrikta Rahita Taraka Rajayoga*** 2. ***Mahatma's letters*** in three volumes are published they are available with U. Srinivasacharya, 12 Uttaramada Street Tirupati - 517507. Phone (08574) 228814.

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3. ***Master C.V.V. Jeevitakatha-Sarvari 1996.***

29. KURTALAM MOUNA SWAMI (1868 - 1943)

Mounaswami is among those kings of yogis who brought eternal renown not only in Andhra but also outside it. Picchayya, the third child of the Brahmin couple Acchytuni Bapanayya and Sitamma living in Noonevaripalem of Bapatla Taluq, was born on 20.4.1868. The child Picchayya was adopted by the close relations of his parents, by name Lashminarasayya and Sundaramma. The couple named him Sivayya and brought him up with great love and affection. The adopted parents lived in Pandillapalle. They gave Sivayya good education and very early he developed great bhakti and jnana. Sivayya was, at the proper time, married to Kameswaramma daughter of Veeramma and Papayya. Sivayya worked for some time in the excise department and in 1894 moved to Rajahmundry. As a result of the help of a close relation, Davuluri Umamaheswara Rao, he got job as a clerk. His employer was Muddula Tatayya, a grain merchant. Working with great dedication and honesty Sivayya earned for his employer Lakhs of rupees. Sivayya and Kameswarmma had a son, Nagabhushanam, and two daughters, Lakshminarasamma and Sundaramma. He duly performed the thread ceremony of his son and the marriages of his daughters. Though he was householder, Sivayya was averse to worldly enjoyments. He was a great worshipper of Devi, the Goddess. Gifted with sharp intelligence, a sweet voice and good knowledge of music, Sivayya used to give discourses in the night time on Ramayana, Mahabharata and Puranas. Huge crowds used to gather for his Harikatha performance. As life was being led in this way, suddenly, the wife of Davuluri Umamaheswara Rao, a close relative, died. Sivayya brought up his children too. All the children used to go for bath to the river Godavari. And Umamaheswara Rao's son was drowned in the river one day. Sivayya received a rude shock in life. His mind was totally disturbed and his consciousness began moving away from the external to the inner world. It launched itself on the quest for self-realisation.

After some days (in the year 1906), one midnight, Sivayya left home without telling anyone except his daughter that he was going on urgent work. He never crossed the threshold of his home again. Seeking a guru, he visited holy pilgrim centers all over India. One year he was in the presence of Ramana Maharshi in Tiruvannamalai. It was there that he received the blessings of Seshadri Swami. Travelling through north India, he took sanyasa vows from Sri Acchyutananda Saraswati Swami and assumed the name Sri Sivachidanand Saraswati. At the command of his guru he pursued the practice of yoga and travelled all over the country. During these travels, when he was in Naimisaranya , he met, near Barabanky, in a mountain cave, Sri Venkatachalam Pantulu who was doing tapas for hundreds of years. He served him for some time. He also served Sri Vasudevananda Saraswati (Tembe Swami) who was an incarnation of Dattatreya. From him he absorbed all the sastras and yogic techniques. He attained perfection in yoga and became a Siddha. For some strong reason, either in Kashmir or in the forest near Vriddachala he took the vow of silence, (mouna). The one who was called Picchayya, Sivayya, Siva-Chidananda Saraswati was now transformed as "Mouna Swami", after he took the vow of silence. From that day onwards, he used to communicate his thoughts, ideas or orders through signs or by writing. For some time he was in intense tapas in a cave at Panchavati. It was when he was residing at Panchavati that, at the wish of Brahmananda Saraswati Swami of Banaras, he did something extraordinary. He lifted a huge statue of Adi Sankara, which had fallen to the ground in a mandir , with his yogic powers, without the help of anyone, and reinstalled it on the altar, as per the rituals of the sastras.

Mouna Swami left Panchavati and visited the pilgrim centers on the western coast. On his way to Mookambika pilgrim center, in the darkness, he lost his way and praying to the Goddess he regained his path. It happened in this way: a dark complexioned lady of exceptional beauty appeared and taking him to the Mookambika temple disappeared. Mouna Swami then realised that it was Mookambika Devi Herself who appeared in that form and overcome by ecstatic emotion he burst out singing praises

to the Goddess. He also wrote the *Kshetra Mahima of Mookambika* on a piece of paper and gave it to the followers of Veera Saiva path who came on a pilgrimage there. The Swami along with those devotees, on his way to Mangalore, stopped at the place where there was Chitrakoot mountain. One day he was sitting under a tree in a state of samadhi and because of a violent hurricane at that time a huge branch of a tree fell on him. The devotees scattered in all directions. But the Swami remained in samadhi. After the samadhi state, he lifted the huge branch of the tree with his own hands and threw it away. The devotees were amazed at the Swami's superhuman energy. The Mouna Swami travelled further and entered the Pandya region. He visited many pilgrim centers and reached "Kurtalam" which was considered a powerful Trikutachala Kshetra. Kurtalam is famous as an abode of exceptional natural beauty. It was the place where Agastya did penance. Caressed by the herbal plants the waterfalls flow as the currents of nectar. It is said that the illnesses and past karmas of those who take a bath in the waters are washed away. Siva, at this place is called Trikutachalapathi or Kurtalanatha. On the right side of the deity we find Venuvagvadini Devi and on the left Parasakti. The Parasakti is the Meru Prastara Sri Chakra. This is one of the 51 Dharani Peethas. In the presence of the Peetha, the Mouna Swami often experienced samadhi. The Swami made the temple itself as the abode of his penance, his thapobhumi.

In 1909, the Sringeri Jagadguru Sri Satchidananda Sivabhinava Nrisimha Bharati Swami came to Papanasanam near Ambasamudram for his mandatory four-month stay called Chaturmasya. The Mouna Swami went for his darshan. Then the Jagadguru told the Swami that Kurtalam is a very congenial place for sadhana but there were no facilities necessary for the sadhu's stay. Therefore, he suggested that the Mouna Swami should build a Math there. The Swami welcomed the suggestion. Yogis and Mahatmas, great Masters, show their occult, spiritual powers only when the context demands such demonstration. The Mouna Swami who was leading a life of complete silence in the Kurtaleswara temple, now had to show his siddhis to fulfill the wish of sringeri Jagadguru of

building a math. The Swami used to buy the sacred prasada of the temple giving some copper coins and eat. Now he started creating the coins out of his empty hand. Seeing this strange spectacle, the temple priests and devotees were amazed. This was something they could never imagine as possible. Hitherto, the Swami, at midday, and at night always remained in the precincts of the temple itself and the priests used to lock the temple door from outside. He was always seen doing tapas within the temple precincts. Now, the Swami often appeared outside the temple at midday and when the temple door was opened they used to see him, as usual, inside the temple itself. With these powers, the Swami became a figure who inspired great respect and devotion among the countless devotees who came for the darshan of Lord Kurtalanatheswara. Whenever the Jagadgurus of Sringeri and Kanchi visited the place the Mittadar of Pudukkotta had to offer them hospitality. He was a rich man and had no difficulty in doing all honors. Sundaram Iyer who visited Kurtalam in the appropriate season was a great devotee of Siva and the Divine Mother. He developed great faith and devotion for the Mouna Swami. The number of devotees who came for the Swami's darshan increased enormously, day by day. The temple authorities provided all the facilities to the pilgrims. They finally granted a small piece of land outside the temple to the Swami for the construction of his ashram. In 1910 Sundaram Iyer got an ashram with a kitchen, a hall and a verandah built on the land. By the side of the ashram a canal flows with water from the waterfalls.

On 7-10-1910, Mouna Swami with the help of Sundaram Iyer, installed the images of Dandayudhapani and Adi Sankara in the ashram premises. At the time of installation, he brought out the nine traditional diamonds (Navaratnas) from his empty hand and placed them under the images. When the arati was being offered to the divine images, from the image of Dandayudhapani a ray of light emanated and remained there for some time. The spectators praised the Swami's superhuman power. Because of the various activities, religious festivals, yajnas, etc., undertaken by the ashram, the number of devotees visiting the ashram increased enormously. The ashram became a well-known kshetra and its reputation

spread far and wide. Many gifts in cash and kind were given by the devotees. The Swami cured V.T.S. Chevuka Pandya Tevar, Settur Zamindar, and friend of Sundaram Iyer of a chronic disease. The Zaminda became the Swami's disciple and helped the Swami's Kurtalam ashram both financially and personally. In the large garden of the Zamindar foundation was laid for a Dattatreya temple. A large hall for devotees to sit, a special room for the Swami's stay and kitchen were built. The foundation was laid on 17.1.1916 and the construction work was completed in fifty days. On 3.10.1916, the installation of the images of Sri Rajarajeswari and Kameswara was done. On 5-7-1919, the images of Sitaramachandra, Santana Gopala Swami and Yoga Narasimhaswami were installed by the Vanamamalai Peetha's head. Then a strange thing happened. The Yantra prepared for installation and made with the five types of metals (Panchalohas), transformed itself into a golden one when it was being actually installed. Towards the north-east of Dattatreya temple, Siddhi Vinayaka was installed. The devotees there noticed a strange thing: at the time when arati was given to the statue, it began to beat its pulse as if it is alive. The Swami became a famous sage all over the country. At the time of the installation of the images of Shanmukha and Ayyappa, the copper-made yantra turned into gold. Not only Hindus but also western Christians such as the Madras Governor Archbald Nigh and his wife became the Swami's devotees after having had darshan of the image installed by the Swami.

In course of time, as in all Dattatreya mandirs, the Siddheswari Peetham was established. On all important days, celebrations were held regularly. Musical concerts by famous singers were held. The Swami used to confer honorary titles on philanthropists and on those who spread the spiritual culture. The Swami travelled all over India. In many important places such as Kasi, Tiruvayyur, Madras, Nellore, Sandur, Guntur and Chirala the Swami did installations of divine images and abhishekas. He established a trust also to look after the functioning of the various centers. The Mouna Swami, as he himself foretold earlier, passed a way on 28.12.1943, amidst Vedic chanting Kirtans and bhajans. The Swami

was cremated in the Dandayu-dhapani temple premises itself. On 13.7.1951a Linga was installed on the samadhi itself. Like the samadhis of Shirdi Baba, Sorakayala Swami and Trilinga Swami, today Mouna Swami's samadhi place has also become a great pilgrim center attracting countless devotees from all over. The history of the Swami written by Sundaram Iyer's son has become a sacred scripture for devotees like Dattatreya's *Guru Charitra*. Mouna Swami was merely the founder of the Siddheswari Peeth. After him, Sri Vimalananda Bharati, Sri Trivikrama Ramananda Bharati and Sri Siva Chidananda Bharati Swami became the heads of this center. Now the head of the Peeth is Sri Siddheswaranda Bharati Swami. Today the Siddheswari Peeth has attained phenomenal growth and is regarded all over India as a great center of Advaita philosophy.

Let us now have a look at Mouna Swami's unique personality. The Swami had golden complexion and was of medium height, well built and had a radiant physical frame. After he used to get yoga Samadhi his mind was always immersed in the meditation of Ishwara. By a mere glance he used to know the interior nature of people. He was an adept in Vedas and Sastras. The Swami had a child's innocence. He used to pass into the state of samadhi even by listening to music. He had a very generous, charitable disposition. He used to give anonymous donations. He used to do work with his hands as skillfully as the traditional artisans. He never used to drink water. If devotees insisted, he used to drink coconut water and 'cow's butter milk. Initially, he used to take prasad in Siva temples, later, he used to eat lumps of food in which all the dishes were mixed, prepared by devotees. For some time he accepted only milk and fruits. He gave them up also, and took two or three morsels of the paste of neem leaves. Finally he gave up eating them also. With the power of yoga he made air and light themselves as his food. On two or three occasions he ate food normally prepared for 25 people. During his travels, the Swami always carried with him, the images of Paravati, Parameshwara, Saradamba as also Sri Chakra, and Meru. At the time of Navavarana worship, the Swami was intoxicated with ecstatic devotion

and used to sing bhajans and kirtans. In such contexts he used to shed tears. At the time of doing worship in Sir C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar's house, the Swami experienced the state of samadhi. As if they were immensely pleased, with his devotion the images used to move from one place to another, in the vimana, and this delighted the devotees with both wonder and surprise.

Mouna Swami was a great healer, an adept in curing with traditional medicines. He cured chronic diseases such as diabetes, snake and scorpion bites, blindness, wounds, etc. He used herbal juices and cured them. Visalya Karani, Sandhana Karani and Sanjeeva Karani were under his control. With the pastes of plants he transformed base metals into gold. Once when ghee was not available for the preparation of sweets he transformed, with the use of herbs, kerosene into ghee. The Kumkum the Swami used to give worked wonders as medicine. The Swami saved many devotees from fatal diseases by doing japa and giving the tirtham.

The Swami was proficient in many techniques of yoga. He used to float in air and water. The Swami performed the khanda (dismemberment) yoga in the house of Venkata Subrahmanya Iyer who later, wrote the Swami's biography. He noticed that the head, hands feet and trunk were dismembered and lying at different places. The Swami taught the subtleties of yoga practice to a doctor in Chittoor and Vaishnava devotee in Madras. The Swami used to appear at different places at the same time. Once he took bhiksha simultaneously, at Madras and Amba Samudram, at the same time. This is called Kayavyuha Sakti. In 1912, the Swami was moving along with Sundaram Iyer and other devotees. He then entered the state of samadhi and not only did he witness the Pushpanjali Abhisheka being held in Kanya Kumari but also made the disciple, see it. He also materialised the Kanya Kumari prasadam in their hands. This was a unique miracle. The Swami performed worship in Kilpauk in the house of Subbaraya Chetty and he placed the prasadam in his hands. From that emerged a small image of a child. As a result the Chettiyar who had no children was, within a year, blessed with a son. Once the Swami stayed

in Kumbhakonam for a few days and came to the railway station to leave that place. But the train had left by the time he came there. But, . we do not know what the Swami's will was, the train stopped before it reached the end of the platform. The Swami got in and it moved again. An engineer, Ramaswami Iyer, living in the precincts of the Datta Mandir, fell sick and died suddenly. The Swami got the news and went there immediately. He then rubbed the sacred Vibhuti on his forehead and pressing it there meditated for same time. Iyer gradually regained consciousness and came back to life. As a result of this, the Swami himself was ill for six months. Obviously he took over the Karma of Iyer on himself.

In 1921, Mouna Swami was a guest of the royal couple of Sandur in the Bellary district. He got the thick jungle cleared and revealed that a temple dedicated to Lord Subrahmanya was hidden there. When the royal couple expressed the desire to see the Swami as a Truthful sanyasi, he agreed to be photographed. In the photo he appeared as a 30-year old monk. In 1916 the Raja of Bhadrachalam asked him about the process of alchemy - Swama yoga. Then the Swami closed his hands, and gold from one hand and kumkum from another and gave them to the Raja. During the period of construction of Dandayudhapani temple, in Shenkota, the Swami stayed in the house of Ramaswami Iyer. When the maistri (the builder) came to ask for wages (for the week) the Swami used to show him the roots of a tree nearby and ask him to dig it there and take his wage. Where the maistri dug, he invariably used to get the wage due to him for the week's labour. Two devotees, by name Kanuparti Markandeya Sarma and Kamaraju Adinarayana Sarma stayed for some time with the Swami in Kurtalam. Suddenly Adinarayana Sharma fell severely sick. They put him too on the ground thinking he would die. The Swami came there, rubbed vibhuti all over the body and put some in his mouth. Sharma got up and when he said he was hungry the Swami fed him curd rice. A devotee by name A.K.S. Iyengar, in spite of the Swami's insistence not to leave Kurtalam, left for Madras and went through severe,

intolerable sickness for three months. The doctors declared that they were helpless. When the Swami sent prasad, he regained his health.

Impressed by the Swami's yogic powers and miracles, even Christians and Muslims used to come to Kurtalam, have his darshan and take the prasad he gave. There are countless instance of their desires being fulfilled by the Swami. Once the Governor of Madras Lord Pentland and his wife came to Kurtalam, on their tour of the area, and spent 45 minutes with the Swami. When they were about to leave the Swami gave the Governor and his wife each a garland of roses, the variety of which was not to be found any where. Similarly, he gave them apples of the finest variety as prasad. How they came and from where remained a mystery to both the Governor and the devotees there. J.C. Maloney, a member of the Governor's council frequently came, along with his wife, for the Swami's darshan. At the request of his wife, the Swami gave her an image of Vighneswara. The couple offered worship to the deity daily. Maloney used to send Rs. 36/- every month for the sake of worship in the temple. Even after retirement and return to their country, they continued sending the amount. An indigenous doctor and a very rich man by name Zainulabuddin came to the Swami for learning about the secrets of herbal medicines and became his disciples. A couple living in Ramanathapuram did not have children even after 16 years of married life. The Swami said that a second marriage would ensure children but the man was not willing to marry. Unexpectedly, the first wife died; he got married a second time and he had a child within one year.

The Mouna Swami's messages, teachings and opinions were always direct and pointed. They used to go directly to the heart and get absorbed. Once the Swami caught hold of the ceiling of a house made of wooden girders and then left them. He told the devotees:

"Though the hands and the wooden girders are different, when once you catch them, they give the illusion of being the same. In the same way our experiences of and relations with others not only are different but they also do not have any relation in the process of experiencing them.

Therefore, it is a mistake to regard them as our own. In this way, similarly, we have to develop dispassion and detachment is the main instrument. With the spirit of intense renunciation one can attain 'nirvikalpa samadhi.' Don't crave for worldly enjoyments. You should desire peace of mind alone. If we go in for worldly pleasures, we get only sorrow and suffering. Often we see good people and devotees going through lot of difficulties. Hence, to think that good people should become bad is ignorance. This world itself is a market street. The relations we develop in this are momentary. The enlightened man-the Jnani-is not perturbed by the experience of auspicious or inauspicious things. He bears all suffering with patience since he knows they are inevitable. But the ignorant one- ajnani-goes through hell." He also said: "Of the four stages of life (ashramas) that of the householder is the best. If the householder does not take to evil ways, and if he is able to over come the bonds of the householder's life, he is, in his practice of virtue (dharma) very great. He is equal to Janaka." "The supremely powerful mother is the best (deity). If we pray to her with a pure mind, she rushes to you, as the calf does to the cow."

Accounts of Mouna Swami's life and his yogic powers are to be found in the biography written by Subrahmanya Iyer, *Vyasa Puja Mahatyam* by K.R. Viswanatha Sastri, *Guru Paduka Puja Kalpa* by Ramaswami Sastri, *The Temple of Beauty* by R.S. Ramaswami Sastri, and in the writings of Sri Suddhananda Bharati. We also get details in the writings of Sri B.V. Narasimha Swami (1874-1956) whose biography of Shirdi Sai Baba is a pioneering work. We learn from Marshall Govindan's book *Babaji and the 18 Siddha Yoga Traditions* (Montreal, 1991) one wonderful incident: A rich man Annamalai Chetty's second son Ramaiah suffered from bone T.B for six years. He then followed Babaji's "Kriya Yoga". At that juncture in 1952, Mouna Swami appeared in person and cured him of the chronic disease.

Source:

Sri Mouna Swami - B. Rama Raju 1994.

30. KOTTHALANKA SYED AHMEDALISHAW KHADAR VALI (1868-1948)

The various religions in the world are different paths to reach the same Paramatman, the Supreme God. Yogis and great masters who realised the Supreme are in all castes and in all religions. Just as many sages are born in the roots of Hinduism, in the Islamic religion also who came from outside, we find many siddhas who are objects of intense veneration. Among such sages Syed Ahmedalishaw Khadar Vali who passed away in the Koththalanka village of Mummidivaram Mandal, East Godavari Dist., in 1948, was one. Information about him is compiled by Panguluri Veeraraghavudu in his *Andhra Mahabhakta Vijayam*, in the essay by Koththalanka Yogi and the special supplements of *Andhra Bhoo* and *Eenadu* published from East Godavari (28-7-1996).

One Kondapalli Yajyanna, resident of Koththalanka, at the time of census in his block obtained, with great difficulty, some details questioning the Yogi himself. According to this information, this great sage was born in family of Jagirdars in the Nalgonda district of Nizam State. The names of his parents are not known. By that time itself, he was said to be 125 years old. According to this calculation, he must have been born around 1796. Around 1850 he was found wearing a loin cloth, with a clay pot beside him near a sweet shop in that village Kundaleswaram on the banks of river Godavari. He was indifferent to heat and cold and ate whatever was given. When he crossed the river without the body becoming wet on Gautami river, people realised that he was siddhapa a man with occult powers. When Vali was living in Kundaleswaram itself, Krishnavadhuta, resident of the Kotilingala Math in Rajahmundry followed Vali for his grace. He wanted to get the blessings of Vali Saheb But Vali pelted stones at him in an attempt to prevent him from following. Those who saw this, felt glad that Krishnavadhuta had deserving punishment for following a mad Muslim. But the Avdhuta told them that the sage didn't throw stones at him out of anger but only as a means of

testing him. Finally, Krishnavadhuta succeeded in getting the blessings of Khadar Vali.

Khadar Vali was above all dualities and used to roam sometimes with a loin cloth and at other time, totally naked. He used to roam wherever he liked in jungles or plains and smell the leaves that were within his reach. But when anyone approached him he used to frighten them. If on his path, there were garbage heaps, he used to sit on them. After urination or after going to the toilet, he never cleaned himself or took a bath. No wonder the people were disgusted with him. Though he was pure, he appeared unclean. He used to sleep wherever he liked. Whatever was given by persons who came for his darshan with devotion, he used to eat it. He used to test his disciples very severely. Only those who succeeded in this testing, he accepted as his disciples. He used to tell his followers auspicious and inauspicious events that were to happen in future and in this way did enormous service to them. Once when Gedela Venkataratnam asked him why he came so far from Nalgonda, he replied that it was his "past karma", prarabdha, which drove him there. Tajuddin Baba (1861- 1925) who passed away in Nagpur was his friend. It is said that Khadar Vali stayed with Tajuddin Baba for some time in Nagpur. It is said in *Sai Leelamritam* that Shirdi Sai Baba regarded Tajuddin Baba as his brother.

Madhavarpu Kondayya lived in Kesanakurru. His wife suffered from uterine problems and she served Khadar Vali with tremendous faith and devotion. As a result, she regained her health and was blessed with children also. One day along with her husband and son she went for darshan of Khadar Vali and gave him some farina pudding, with great devotion and respects. The sage took some and left the remainder in the glass. The family ate it as prasad. Khadar Vali was deeply moved by their devotion and blessed them. As a result the family was blessed with not health and long life, but also immense wealth and as noted earlier, children, too. One Marwadi Brahmin presented laddus to the sage. He ate some portion of a laddu and gave the rest (touched by his mouth) as prasad to the Marwadi. He took home, but instead eating it, kept the piece in an almirah. That night the Vali appeared in a dream to the

Mardwadi and told him: "Since you have been indifferent to the prasad I gave you, many calamities will befall you." When the Marwadi took, next morning, fresh laddus to Vali, he refused to take them and drove away the Marwadi. The Marwadi went back, and repented for the harm he had done, and ate the remainder of the laddu that the Vali left for him. The Vali became pacified. This incident was recorded by Akundi Subrahmanya Sastri of Kesanakurru.

When the Vali was living in Kundaleshwaram, Govinda Rajulu the second son of Gedala Swamy living in the neighbouring Kothalanka, was sent by his father to seek the blessings of the Vali so that he would have children. This son took two tender coconuts to offer Vali. The sage got livid with anger and drove him away. But the next day Govindarajulu took two coconuts and went for Vali's darshan. Khadar Vali accepted and ate them. Govindarajulu gradually developed great devotion to Vali and regularly went for his darshan, taking whatever fruit was available as an offering to him. In serving him with utmost devotion, he forgot the desire with which he sought Khadar Vali's darshan. Alongside the spirit of devotion and service to this guru, he also developed intense renunciation. His mind focussed on the eternal spiritual wealth rather than the peripheral worldly well-being. However, whether it was the blessings of his guru or divine will, he had four daughters and one son. But his father felt unhappy that his son was always with Khadar Vali and took little delight at the birth of the grand children. Govindarajulu gradually developed intense vairagya. Afraid that the son would leave the family and follow his guru, the father Gedala Swami and his eldest son Venkata Swami went to the guru and his disciple. They pleaded with Govindarajulu to return home and look after his family responsibilities. They made Khadar Vali accept their suggestion that he should leave Kundaleswaram and live in Kothalanka. Their idea was that if his guru moved to Kothalanka, Govindarajulu could continue to live at home and serve his guru simultaneously. Khadar Vali, as per their wish, went to live in Kothalanka and Govindarajulu went back to his home.

Though he started living in Kothalanka, Khadar Vali always used to roam in the cocqnut fields, alone. It is the duty of the disciple to leave the household and go with the guru, wherever he goes. Govindarajulu's spirit of renunciation and antipathy to family life, crossed the limits of tolerance. The agitated father and brother decided to employ all tricks to bring back Govindarajulu to the family fold. They told him point blank, "Tell us the greatness of your guru or if you fail to do that come back and look after the family." But Govindarajulu remained indifferent. The time arrived for Khadar Vali to free his disciple from this crisis. One day the sage was in a solitary place when a violent cyclone hit the area. The entire village was flooded with water. Govindarajulu was worried where his guru was at this time and searched everywhere for him. Finally, he found him sitting on the bank of the big canal, shielding his face with the leaf of a toddy tree, shivering with cold. Govindarajulu brought his guru, shivering with cold and drenched in water, to his home, carrying him on his back. He kept him in a room and not to disturb his sleep locked the door from outside. For keeping his guru warm, he lit a fire inside the room. Govindarajulu watched on the threshold so that his guru could take rest after such a calamity. They opened the room after four hours, only to find that the sage had disappeared. The room had no other opening except the door which they duly locked and stood guard. They searched the house in vain. Then the two brothers went to search where the guru was. The villagers thought something inauspicious had happened. Then news reached the brothers that the guru was located in the street to the north of the village. The brothers ran there and brought him back to their home. Seeing that the sage who was locked in the room (without any other exit) was found in another corner of the village, Govindarajulu's brother Venkataratnam realised that Vali was not an ordinary Sadhu. The scales fell from his eyes.

He now knew that Vali was an extraordinary guru, an Avadhuta, and he followed the footsteps of his brother and became Khadar Vali's disciple. In this way the crisis was averted for Govindarajulu. His desire to serve his guru with heart and soul continued uninterruptedly. They are

both a worthy guru and a worthy disciple. All the tests that the guru set, the disciple easily overcame with intense devotion and faith. One day Khadar Vali was lying in a solitary area, with his body full of excreta stinking intolerably. When Govindarajulu asked him to give permission to clean the body with a bath, the guru said that if he gives a bath there itself, he will shiver with cold. Therefore, he asked Govindarajulu to take him to his own home and clean the body. The disciple carried home his guru on his shoulders and gave him a bath. Govinda Rajulu who withstood many such ordeals in the service of his guru, reminds us of Deepaka who served his guru Vedadharma as narrated in *Guru Charitra*. Kothalanka Yogi was charmed to see the intense devotion of the disciple and the unique affection of the guru for the disciple.

One day Muslims from Ramachandrapuram and a Brahmin and a Kshatriya from Rajole came to have darshan of the sage. He was not in the village. He was roaming in all kinds of places inaccessible to them. The visitors then sought the help of Govindarajulu. He set out to locate the sage on 30.12.1931 in the morning and finally found him. He brought him (with him) around 1 'o clock in the afternoon. Incidentally, it became easy for Kothalanka Yogi who arrived just then to have the darshan of Vali. Vali began sleeping soundly on the pyal. The disciple was massaging the guru's feet. After some time the Master asked his disciple to sing some bhajans. Govindarajulu took cymbals into his hand and started singing the kirtana composed by Bhadrachala Ram Das until 7 'o clock in the evening. Then Gourayya, Govindarajulu's younger brother, asked the sage whether the bhajan singing could be stopped. Khadar Vali said that it should continue and his favourite kirtan "Pahi Rama Prabho" was sung again and again. From all this, Kothalanka Yogi realised that Khadar Vali was a great Yogi and like Kabir was a great devotee of Rama. He was also impressed by the intense devotion Govindarajulu had for his guru. When women came seeking his blessings for having children, Vali used to give them his divine blessings. And when they came with the request that he should name them, he used to say that the name of Rama should be given to the child. This is an example of his devotion to Rama. Vali

had immense liking only for devotional singing. When great singers came and he found no devotion in them he used to say 'no' to them. He listened with great attention when Govindarajulu and Sunkari Ramadasu sang bhajans with intense feeling of devotion. For him it was devotion that was important and not music.

At night on that day, when the sage came to the place where Kothalanka Yogi was preparing to go to sleep, the Yogi stood up with respect. Vali lay down on the palmyra mat on which the Yogi was lying. He covered himself with a thin cloth. With the idea that in some way or the other he should serve the great sage, Kothalanka Yogi said: "Sir, it is very cold. Shall I cover you with a blanket?" Khader Vali replied, "I covered myself with a blanket. It is enough." When the Yogi insisted and said, "It is a very thin cloth. My blanket is thick, please cover with it," the sage got angry and shouted at him: "Get off the Pyal!" The Yogi was terrified, went to another place and kept awake throughout the night. He felt delighted that the Sage talked to him at least in this way. Next day, the Yogi went to Kesanakurru to see Akundi Subrahmanya Sastri, a great devotee. That morning when some devotees from Kakinada arrived and paying their respects to the Sage, they touched his feet, in spite of his saying that they should not touch his feet. Annoyed at this behavior, the Sage, without telling anyone, went off in the direction of the coconut groves. Those who came for his darshan went in that direction, but unable to locate him they returned. But Paneyyavadhuta, the disciple of Golla Bucchi Rajavadhuta, followed Khadar Vali Yogi for a long distance. Vali walked in an erratic way and going behind a bamboo curtain, disappeared. Paneyyavadhuta desperately searched but unable to find him, returned disappointed. The same thing happened to Kothalanka Yogi and Govinda Rajulu. They searched everywhere but all in vain with surprise writ large on their faces, they returned.

One day the Yogi was lying in a coconut grove belonging to Pacchamatla Rama Krishnam Raju. Then two devotees, Basava Narayana Swami and Potturi Venkata Soma Raju saw a strange sight; a huge snake unfurled its hood on the head of the great Yogi so that sunlight

will not fall on it. It was as if the snake was holding an umbrella. The two devotees went and told Kondapalli Yajnanna Sastri who in turn told Kothalanka Yogi. The Sage came into the village only when someone brought him there. If no one called him or brought him, he used to remain in the coconut groves or lonely places, for months at a stretch. Among the Yogi's disciples Akundi Subrahmanya Sastri was one. Khadar Vali was adored by people of all castes and they rendered him whatever service he needed. However, in this group, the number of Brahmins was less. Once some residents of Amalapuram came, caught his hand forcibly put him in a cart and took him away to Amalapuram. They kept him in a house and were making preparations for a gathering to have his darshan. The Sage vanished and appeared in Kothalanka. His close disciple Govindarajulu, with the permission of his guru went on pilgrimage. After seeing Tirupati and other centers he got into a train to go to Varanasi. By the time he reached Waitair, he felt a longing to go back home. Meanwhile, his wife and children implored the Sage that he should make him come back home, since it was many days that he left home. Then the Sage told them that he will arrive at 10 'o clock in the morning the next day. Exactly as the sage revealed, Govindarajulu took the train at Visakhapatnam, got off at Dwarapudi at midnight. He then walked for 40 miles and reached home exactly at 10 'o clock in the morning. This was the nature of Khadar Vali's great power of attraction. In another context, Govindarajulu was looking for the Sage, he saw him on the bank of the big canal at a distance of two furlongs. Even as Govindarajulu was looking at him from where he stood, he saw Vali suddenly start going from the other side of the canal to his side, without his body getting wet. When he asked him how he could cross a distance of 20 yards of the canal without his body getting wet, Vali told him that he crossed on a raft. But Govindarajulu failed to see any such thing any where.

People from distant places became devotees of Khader Vali. Out of love when they sent some fruits or sweets, if he liked to take, he ate a little. Once a lady devotee by name Venkata Narasamma, who lived in Kapileswarapuram, 15 miles away, sent him some cheese. The Saint

took it with relish. Once Vali developed a gangrene like thing on his ankle from which blood and pus oozed. But he roamed all over the coconut grove without wearing any thing on the feet. After some time the wound was healed without any herb or medicine. We also learn from the write up in the Telugu newspaper *Andhra Bhoomi*, many miracles that the Saint performed: he showed Khandayoga (dismemberment of the body); with his powers of precognition, he told the army officer of Rangoon that the British would attack their country; we also have the miracle of two horns growing on a coconut, due to his occult powers. Once when some villagers were walking along with him, a snake appeared, wound itself round his leg and stung him. Khadar Vali pulled it out forcibly and flung it far off. But it came running again and stung him again. When the villagers tried to kill it, Vali stopped them. The Saint returned to the village and slept soundly as if nothing happened. Nothing happened to him but the snake died. This was the Saints great play, his leela. Can we say that the serpent had really bitten him who was wedded to non-violence? It is said creatures with violent tendencies shed their cruel nature in the presence of such holy persons. Could it be that God - the Supreme Being came in the form of the snake, tested the Saint's dedication to the principle of non- violence and left its body there to show to the world the power and influence of non-violence to the world?

Akundi Subrahmanya Sastri saw Khadar Vali at Kundaleswaram when he (Sastri) was young, and the Saint was 30 years old. The Saint lived at that place for 30 years. This means the Saint left Kundaleswaram and reached Kothalanka when he was 60 years old. Kothalanka Yogi met Subrahmanya Sastri there, 16 years after the Sage arrived there. At that time, Vali was 76 or 80 years old. However, this is a debatable point in the opinion of Kothalanka Yogi.

In honour of Vali's Urs, the newspapers *Eenadu* and *Andhra Bhoomi* published special supplements in their East Godavari editions, (on 28-7-1996). Eenadu states that he was born in 1818 and died on 22-1-1948; and that a Darga was built on his Samadhi in 1953. In 1947, Congress

leaders Kala Venkata Rao and Bulusu Sambamurti had darshan of the Saint when they visited Kothalanka. It is said he was 175 years old then. In the *Andhra Bhoomi* article, it is said that the Saint lived for 150 to 200 years. The Saint attained Jiva Samadhi on 22-1-1948, the birthday of Prophet Mohammed, the festival of Milad-un-Nabi. This event occurs in the month of Rabbiulawal. According to the Muslim calendar, that year was Hijri 1367 and on 10th Rabbiulawal, Milad-un-Nabi occurred. This corresponds to the Hindu year Sarvajit and the day was Pushya Shuddha Ekadasi, Thursday. The Muslim festival changes according to the lunar calendar. In 1948, it came on January 22nd and in 1966 it occurred on July 28th.

From all the four corners of the country lakhs of devotees both Hindus and Muslim come to celebrate the Saint's Urs. These celebrations are held by Gedala Venkataratnam, Govindarajulu and Gavarayya brothers, by turns. In those two newspapers published to mark that event photographs of Khadar Vali and the Darga appeared. According to these details, Akundi Subrahmanya Sastri's view the Saint could be 80 years old seems credible. Hence, we can reasonably say that the Saint was born in Gollapalli, Nalgonda district in 1868, and attained Samadhi in Kothalanka East Godavari district, in 1948. We require more details about the write-ups regarding the Saint before those by Kothalanka Yogi and Subrahmanya Sastri appeared. Then only we can be certain about many details. *Eenadu* newspaper mentions that mandirs in honor of the saint exist in Guntur and Machilipatnam. Moreover, this article describes many miracles that the Saint performed such as, for instance, the Saint walking on water, lying on blocks of snow, the kernel in the coconuts disappearing along with the coconut water he drank, and his powers of foretelling the future of many disciples and devotees through the language of silence. There is also the belief that devotees who sleep at the Saint's samadhi for three days continuously, will have a dream in which they have darshan of the Saint.

From the fortnightly journal Saiba (published from Ongole (1.10.1996) we learn that devotees not only from the four corners of the

country (specially Kolkata, Delhi, Berhampur, Allahabad, etc..) but also from Kuwait, Pakistan, Dubai come for the darshan of this Baba's Dargah. In the preface to *Siddhanta Panchanga* (almanac) for Krodhi (1985), there are life-histories and pictures of many Yogis and Yoginis. In the foot note to the picture of Kothalanka Yogi as a naked Sadhu, we find written in Urdu: Syed Ahmedali Khadar Vali, Naya (New) Lanka, Amalapur." We visited the Darga on 29-12-2001.

Sources:

1. *Andhra Mahabhakta Vijayamu-Panguluri Veeraraghavudu-1957*
2. *Eenadu* 28.7.1996 East Godawari Edition
5. *Andhra Bhurni* - 28.7.1996 East Godawari Edition
4. *Saibaba (quarterly) Ongole* 1-10-1996
5. *Siddhanta Panchaga of Krodi* (1985)

31. TANDUR ABDUL KARIM SHAH VALI (1870-1947)

As in the case of Hindus, Muslims also have religious sects. One such in Islam is the Sufi. Like the votaries of Advaita in Hinduism, Sufis also proclaim a faith comparable to "I am Brahman" In the middle of the 19th century, there lived a poor devotee by name Syed Sufi Mohammed in Shaji village in Afghanistan. His only wealth was ten goats. They were the only support for the family. Syed and his wife were great devotees of God and that faith made them live with contentment that even the rich by birth do not have. Their first-born was Abdul Razaak. Then a second son was born who was extremely radiant and beautiful. According to the Muslim conventions, they named him as Syed Abdul Karim Shah. Right from childhood he had great devotion to God. Not fond of games, etc., as other children he preferred to be alone. He liked solitude. When he was sent to school, he did not like learning the secular education; instead he was lost in intense meditation on God sitting outside the village. If he felt like it, he went to school; if not he sat in a corner of his house and seemed lost, thinking and meditating on what the family did not know. But he was greatly devoted to his parents. When the father saw that he was not interested in going to school, he did not feel like compelling him. Instead he used to send him to look after the goats, taking them outside the village. Karim Shah left the goats in the forest and sitting alone was lost in meditation on God. By evening he used to return home with the goats. Under Karim Shah's care and affection, the herd of goats increased in number and the income of the family went up remarkably. However, the strange thing was that in the middle of the night Karim repaired to the forest alone, and sat in meditation. The father noticed this and to prevent any calamity befalling Karim, used to tie Karim's leg to his brother Razaak's hand with a chain. But at midnight, Karim slipped away, as usual, freeing himself from the chain and went to the forest. Karim was now 12 years old.

In Telangana there is a famous trade and business center called Tandur

which, earlier in Medak district, is now in the Ranga Reddy district. In the 19th century Syed Wali Mohammed, brother of Sufi Mohammed came to the Nizam territory and settled in Tandur. He owned two cloth shops; one in Tandur and the other in Ekheli. He earned lots of money in the business of cloth selling. Syed Wali Mohammed had only daughters and no sons. Therefore, he went to his birthplace Shaji in Afghanistan. He requested his brother Sufi Mohammed to give him his son (in adoption). He said he would look after him and at the proper time give his own daughter in marriage to him. Initially, Sufi Mohammed refused to send his son to a far-off place. But when his wife pointed out that their son would become heir to riches and would lead a better life than they themselves; he agreed. Finally, he sent Karim along with his brother to the Nizam dominion. Wali Mohammed's wife and children were simply charmed seeing Karim. They immensely liked his gracious manners and his beautiful personality. Karim Shah, too, mixed with the family effortlessly. He did every thing - all kinds of work - that his uncle and auntie wanted him to. He did the work in the cloth shop with great dedication. But his nights were completely given to meditation on God. This went unnoticed. Afraid that such a handsome, well-behaved boy will be taken away again by his parents to Afghanistan, they got the 14 year old boy married to their own 10 year old daughter. They gave the cloth shop in Ekheli to him. Though he was very young, Karim managed the cloth shop very well and earned handsome profits. He became very close to the people of the village. Both the Hindu and Muslim communities loved him very much.

After some time, a great sage by name Syed Sultan Ali Shah travelling all over the country, happened to come to Ekheli from Hyderabad. He was a great Yogi. He had many disciples and devotees in Ekheli. Karim Shah heard that the Saint was going to the mosque to offer namaz. He also went to the mosque. As he was washing his hands and feet before entering the mosque, it so happened that Ali Shah's glance fell on him. After namaz, all the disciples of Ali Shaw sat around him, and Karim also went there. He looked at the Saint intently and the thought came to

him that he should be initiated by Ali Shah. But seeing that unlike the noble gurus, Ali Shah was dressed ostentatiously and was addicted to frequent smoking, he disliked him and, tossed about by ambivalent feelings returned. But even after reaching home, his entire mind was preoccupied with thoughts of Ali Shah. He went again in the evening to have the darshan of the Saint. He greeted him and sat silently. Ali Shah asked him the reason for his coming. He then told him to kindly give him initiation, Sultan Ali Shah who knew the inner feelings of Karim told him: "I do not possess the qualities of a noble guru which you think I should have. I wear costly clothes and take rich and tasty food. Moreover, I smoke a lot. How will you achieve what you want to by getting initiated by a person like me? I am not a great sage, a Mahatma. Therefore, how can I liberate you? Therefore, you go to some other guru who has the qualities you expect a guru should have. Listening to this Karim sweated profusely with fear. He thought that Ali Shah who could know his innermost thoughts must be surely a great sage with the power of omniscience. He repented that out of ignorance he had misperceived his greatness. He fell at his feet crying and implored him to forgive him. This incident reminds us of the incident in Shirdi Sai Baba's life: a Himalayan Yogi by name Somadeva Swami. He heard about Baba and was on his way to Shirdi. He saw from a distance the flags on the mosque and heard that Baba had a palanquin and a horse. He felt that these are certainly not the qualities of a Sadhu, and decided to go back without Baba's darshan. Baba revealed his innermost thoughts and asked him to go back. Somadeva Swami repented, asked Baba to forgive him and later became a great devotee of Baba. Sultan Ali Shah felt great compassion for Karim and recognizing his genuine repentance, took him to a solitary place. There he did Hastamastaka Samyoga and embraced Karim. With that touch, Karim received a shock like that of electricity and felt that all his nerves were shattered. He lost consciousness and floated in an ocean of celestial joy Like Narendranath undergoing a transformation at the touch of Sri Ramakrishna, a great change occurred in Karim. The joy he felt was indescribable. He remained in that state for quite some time and then took leave of his guru and returned home. He was then 20 years old.

The next morning Sultan Ali Shah left Ekheli. The mantra that the guru gave, the Supreme God embodied in the sacred mantra and the image of the guru himself were now deeply rooted in Kareem's consciousness. His mind turned indifferent to worldly matters. He felt unconcerned about the food he took, the clothes he wore, indeed his body. Alongside his detachment his firmness in the quest for God became stronger and stronger. This news reached Tandur. His uncle and father-in-law Syed Wali Mohammed rushed to Ekheli. But whatever Syed Wali spoke, he listened silently, without uttering a word. Just as in his own country, Afghanistan, he did meditation on God at night, in Ekheli also he went to a forest outside the village and did penance. Whether he did work in the shop or did any other work, he did japa of the mantra his guru gave him.

Then the news reached Karim that Sultan Ali Shah was celebrating the advent of his guru Mohammed Beg Shah in Hyderabad. Karim Shah reached Hyderabad. He did with dedication and devotion several jobs needed in connection with the celebrations, such as carrying water, cleaning the surroundings of the mosque, and other jobs. From a distance he used to do namaskar to his guru and do several jobs until the end of the celebrations. He did not partake of even the feasts connected with the celebrations. After the celebrations were over, Sultan Ali Shah who was immensely pleased with the services rendered by Karim, called him to his presence and asked him to go to Gulbarga Sharif. The celebrated muslim Yogi Khaja Banda Nawaz's Darga was there. Karim went there and did service for two years. During the day he did the jobs of cleaning, carrying water, looking after the comfort of devotees, etc. He then did intense meditation, during nights. After two years of Sadhana, one day Khaja Banda Nawaz gave darshan to him and blessed him. He then asked him to go back to his guru. Karim Shah then went back to his guru in Hyderabad. We do not know what the guru told him but went to Lahore. He served the sages there and went to Pakpathan. The samadhi of a great sage, Sheik Farid Shakkarganj, was there. Devotees from various countries come to this place. The afflicted and the sick go there. Karim

Shah did service to patients and the poor. After he did service for a few months, Sheikh Farid Shakkarganj gave him his darshan and blessed him. Karim Shah then returned to Hyderabad, stayed for a few days serving his guru and then went back to Ekheli. He used to spend the day time with the devotees and night time on meditation. After some months, Sheikh Farid Shakkarganj appeared before him and blessed him. Karim came once again to Hyderabad and after serving his Master went back to Ekheli. He used to take only two or three morsels of food and that was enough for him. He was always immersed in the service of the devotees and in meditation. Though he was wealthy, he never wore clothes that were comparable to his wealth.

The time approached for Sultan Ali Shah to leave his body, in Hyderabad. At that time, his disciple Bijenepalli Mahoob Ali was also with him. Sultan Ali Shah packed into a bundle some invaluable secret things which came to him hereditarily and gave them to Mahboob Ali asking him to keep them carefully. He warned him that none should see those things. If someone with his occult powers comes to know about these things and asks for them he should, without any hesitation, hand them over to that person. He also warned him that if he does not do like that, great calamity will overtake him. Instructing him in this way, Sultan gave up his body at 4 o'clock in the early hours of the day. The local devotees started making preparations for his Samadhi. They sent messages only to those living in the nearby villages. But they did not convey the news to Karim Shah who was to occupy the seat of the guru after Sultan Ali Shah. However, through his intuitive powers, Karim realized that his guru had passed away. He left Ekheli for Hyderabad and travelled by foot. On the way he saw a car in which only the driver was there. The driver stopped the car and asked him to get into the car. Karim told him plainly that he did not have any money to pay except a small mat and a mattress which he offered to give to the driver if he wanted them. Within an hour the car reached Hyderabad. When he was opening the bundle to give the mattress to the driver, he drove away. Karim realized that it was his guru's grace. The date was 16.3.1926 (Hijri 1344, Ramzan

date 2nd , 5 'o clock in the evening; Karim, seeing the dead body of his Master, fainted with uncontrollable grief. As soon as the funeral procession began, he regained consciousness. He accompanied it for a long distance, taking silver coins by the handful from his two pockets and throwing them on the way. There was not a single coin in his pockets but he materialized from them innumerable silver coins. They were collected by fakirs, khavvalis and the poor people who accompanied the funeral procession. By 11'o clock in the night the samadhi of Sultan Ali Shah was over and all the devotees dispersed. Karim remained at the samadhi throughout the night and offering prayers to his guru in the morning, left for Ekheli.

After some time the aradhana celebrations of Khaja Garib Nawaz of Ajmer Sheriff drew near. Karim's guru appeared in a dream to him and ordered him to go and attend these celebrations. Accordingly, Karim went to his guru's Math in Hyderabad. By that time, the devotees of Sultan Ali Shah gathered in the Math on their way to Ajmer Sheriff by train. None of them recognized Karim Shah who boarded the train, along with them, at Kachiguda. Since he was a stranger, the devotees looked at him with suspicion and were carefully guarding their bag and baggage. The train reached Kandwai station. They had to get off there and board another train. Some more devotees joined the group at Kandwai. They looked at Karim intently and felt that they were seeing their guru Sultan Ali Shah. They treated Karim with great respect. And he told them: "Sirs! We have travelled so far under the protection of our guru Sultan Ali. We have crossed that domain now and entered the protecting circle of guru Khaja Garib Nawaz. Therefore, we have to behave carefully." By the time they finished taking food, the Ajmer train arrived. They all boarded that train and reached Ajmer,

Whenever he came to Ajmer, Sultan Ali Shah stayed in the choultry of Farzandali Saheb. Thus the Hyderabad devotees also came to that place. Farzandali Saheb provided them with all facilities. He then took them to the Samadhi of Khaja Garib Nawaz, presented them with articles for worship and brought them back to the lodge. However, Karim Shah

did not accompany them. Instead, during the day he talked to the devotees about spiritual matters. During the night he used to leave for some unknown place alone. One fine morning when Karim was among the devotees, Farzandali Saheb arrived and told him that it was the wish of Khaja Garib Nawaz that he should occupy the peetha occupied earlier by Sultan Ali Shah. The assembled devotees endorsed the suggestion. But Karim Shah did not accept it. For three consecutive days, Farzandali repeated the wish. On the third day night Khaja Garib Nawaz appeared in a dream and told him; "The responsibility of the seat of Sultan Ali Shah is yours only. No one else is qualified to occupy it." Karim accepted the suggestion. On the fourth day, Karim was adorned with a garland and a scarf brought from Garib Nawaz's Samadhi. His greatness was extolled to all the devotees there who were told that they should respect Karim Shah as the representative of Sultan Ali Shah. All the devotees of the guru clapped their hands joyfully in approval, and accepted him as their guru. At that moment, a strange thing happened: some foreigners came, and they were initiated by Karim Shah. After that they were not to be seen again. No one knew who they were, and from where they came. The devotees eventually returned to Hyderabad, stayed for a few days at Ali Shah's Samadhi and went back to their respective places.

Karim Shaw stayed for some days in Ekheli and as per the message he had in a dream he went to see Mahboobali Saheb staying at Bijinepalli. He was not there and he learnt that had gone to Buddha Samudram. He went there and asked him, "I have come for the articles our guru kept with you in secret." Mahboob Ali realized that this was the sage that his guru told him about. He embraced him with joy, took him to Bijinepalli and handed over the articles the guru entrusted, to Kaim. Karim Shah took them to Ekheli again kept them safely and left for Hyderabad since the aradhana celebrations of Sultan Ali Shah were fast approaching. All the devotees who came to attend the function were given all facilities for stay by Abdullah who supervised the running of the Math. The head of the center, Karim Shah was honored as the representative of Sultan Ali Shah. After the functions were over at Hyderabad, the devotees took

Karim Shah as their guru's representative to Nagar Kurnool and honored him. Karim Shah performed all the duties regarding the aradhana celebrations of their guru at Nagar Kurnool and gave discourses on Bhakti to the Hindu and Muslim devotees who gathered there.

It was five years since Karim Shah became the Head of the Peetha. Since it was difficult every year to go to Hyderabad for his guru's Aradhana celebrations, looking after all facilities to make the devotees comfortable, he decided to hold those celebrations in Thandur itself. For that purpose, he bought some land outside Tandur village and provided large houses and lodgings for devotees. From that time onwards, celebrations were done in Tandur itself on a grand scale. Immersed always in contemplation of God, Karim neglected his duty to the family. As a result, his father-in-law Wali Mohammed felt distressed, at the fate that overtook his daughter. One day he made the devotees represent this to Karim Shah and he himself pleaded with him. He told him that it was customary for Muslim saints to be Raja Yogis: that is, pursuing spiritual quest without neglecting the family. Karim Shah realized that his father-in-law was absolutely right and he looked after his wife with care and concern. After some time he married four more wives and had ten sons and two daughters. For 21 years he remained Head of the Math and preached noble truths to disciples. He initiated them into the experience of spiritual truths and fulfilled all their desires as well, and earned not only great spiritual radiance but also achieved great renown as a guru. He toured various places and initiated thousands of persons. On the eve of his guru's Aradhana celebrations in 1946 he fell sick seriously. The disciples brought renowned doctors to treat him. But Karim Shah refused to take any medicine and plunged as usual into intense meditation.

Karim Shah entrusted the holding of his guru's Aradhana celebrations to three Hindu devotees. He told the devotees that he could not attend the celebrations because of ill health and he lived in another house, since devotees would disturb him in his own. But the devotees who came to participate in the celebrations longed for his darshan. The three Hindu disciples managed the celebrations very well. The day after the

celebrations, at 5 'o clock in the evening, Karim Shah gave darshan to the devotees. Since it was the month of Ramzan, Muslim devotees fast the whole day and only at dusk break their fast. The three Hindu devotees sent food to the dining place for Muslims. At that time the guru was conversing with Narayana Reddy, native of Tandur. Meanwhile, it was discovered that enough food was not available for the Muslim devotees. The guru came to know about this and with his occult power sent enough eatables to that place. He gave darshan until 10'o clock in the night to the devotees. They all left for their respective places in the morning filled with joy at the darshan of their guru. Karim Shah was sick again for nearly five months. He declared that no one can escape fate-when the devotees asked him why such a noble soul like himself should suffer. The sixth month of his illness began. Then he informed Narayana Reddy that he would give up his body on 26.12.1947 (Hijri 1367, month of Safar, 12th day). The Sage made all arrangements for samadhi himself. He spoke to Narayana Reddy until 4 'o clock in the evening and then sent him home. But he kept his eldest wife alone in his presence. As it reached 5 'o clock in the evening, he told his wife to pray to God that the time for his samadhi as indicated by his guru drew near. His wife prayed to God that he should live for some more time but he declined saying that she should not go against her husband's words. He then called for his eldest son Salaam Shah, told him whatever was to be told and entrusted some duties to him. He then went into deep meditation on his guru Sultan Ali Shah and praying to God, gave up his body. Hearing the heart-rending cries of the eldest wife, all the other wives and children came running. The devotees, too, arrived. That very night the samadhi was done in accordance with the proper rites. Today that seat of Karim Shah's samadhi is a sacred place of pilgrimage for both Hindu and Muslim devotees.

Karim Shah Vali's Samadhi is in Tandur. And the samadhis of his | guru Sultan Ali Shah, and Sultan's guru Mohammed Baig and Mohammed Baig's guru Sardar Baig Shah are in Boiguda Kamaan area of Hyderabad. And the samadhi of Hafiz Mohammed Ali Shah, the guru of Sardar Baig Shah is in Khairabad outside Lucknow.

Abdul Karim Shah Wali was a great Siddha Master, (master of Siddhis or miraculous powers). Out of his boundless love and compassion he showed many miracles for the sake of his devotees. Some of those miracles are cited here:

1) Lalammad, a disciple of Syed Sultan Ali Shah lived in a village called Thudukurti. After the demise of his guru, he was greatly depressed. He grieved at the Samadhi of his guru. Once when Karim Shah went to Thudukurti, he expressed his great sorrow at the demise of his guru. He requested Vali to show him his guru Syed Sultan Ali Shah. Karim Shah took him inside another room made him sit and asking him to meditate on his guru, came out and closed the doors. Lalammad, accordingly, started meditating intensely and in no time saw Sultan Ali Shah appeared smiling benignly. Lalammad lost himself in ecstasy, seeing his guru. Karim Shah went inside, touched him and brought him out of the room.

2) China Balayya, a poor Harijan, was one of the devotees of Karim Shah. When the government was getting the canals in the Muneerabad area repaired, Balayya went there along with his family. But on the very night he reached Muneerabad, Karim Shah Vali appeared to him in a dream and asked him forthwith to leave that place and go back home. Since he was destitute, he was reluctant to leave the job where he could earn some money. Therefore, he delayed returning for two days. The guru appeared in dream to him again, and angrily told him, that if he delayed leaving, a great calamity will overtake him and his family. He left forthwith with his wife and children. On the very day he left, plague broke out in Muneerabad, and the surrounding areas. Hundreds of people died. Balayya was grateful, lifelong, to his guru who saved him and his family from the dreaded disease.

3) Seshagiri Rao, the Karanam of Kummera village was a devotee of Vali. One day he went to Tandur to have his guru's darshan. It was the rainy season. Their house in Kummera was a very old one. At midnight there was a torrential rain. As a result the raft of the house cracked with a tremendous sound. Seshagiri Rao's mother realized that some calamity

will hit the house. With panic she woke up her daughter and children and quickly took them out of the cracking house. But in that panic she did not notice whether she brought all the children or not. Within a few minutes the house collapsed straight away. And they were shocked to realize that a seven-year old child was trapped inside. They started crying. The neighbours rushed out, brought crowbars and pick axes and removed the mud and the child was found safe and sound, amidst the debris. He was in deep sleep. When the mother took the child in her arms and woke him up, she asked whether he was hit by anything. The boy replied that the Tandur Swami came and held an umbrella over him. And he slept soundly. At Tandur the guru asked Seshagiri Rao to return home forthwith. After returning, he heard of the miraculous way in which his guru saved the child. His eyes welled up with tears of indescribable gratitude.

4) Janamma, living in Tandur, was one of the Reddy devotees of Karim Shah. She frequently went for her guru's darshan. Once she went to Tandur, along with her daughter-in-law, had darshan of her guru and returned to Hyderabad on her way back. That night, they boarded another train to go to Kotha Kota. At midnight, when the train was running between Devarakadara and Kaukuntla railway stations, Janamma had to go to the toilet. Mistaking, in the dim light and sleepy state, the open door of the compartment for the toilet she placed her foot there and fell out of the compartment on the ground below. At the same time, the sleeping daughter-in-law got a dream in which the sage Karim Shah warned her that her mother-in-law had fallen off the train. She got up immediately and unable to see her mother-in-law, pulled the chain and stopped the train, when the guard and other officials came anxiously enquiring, she told them what had happened. They all got off the train and walked along the track backwards. At one place, they found Janamma sitting safe and sound. When they asked her how she was alive, since the accident would certainly have turned fatal, she told them that her guru caught her, when she was about to fall, in his hands, sat her there and left just before they came. Janamma boarded the train again and reached her village safely.

5) Karim Shah Vali gave his darshan at various places at the same time, simultaneously. In the year 1927 (Hijri 1346), on a Friday, Karim Shah offered Namaz at the mosque in Tandur. At the same time, Vali's friends, his relations and devotees saw him at the Namaz in Gulbarga and Bidar mosques. They greeted him after the prayers. And, at the same time again, devotees saw him doing Namaz in the Boiguda mosque in Hyderabad. After the prayers, Karim Shah Vali talked to them. They told each other these incidents when they met and praised the wonderful powers of their guru. We visited Karim Shah Vali's Darga on 26-12- 1999.

Source:

1. *Sadguru Jivita Charitra-Vallamkonda Mallayya.*
Tudukurti-1959.

32. PRAKASANANDA SWAMI (1871 - 1962)

Moksha (Liberation) means cessation of sorrow and attainment of happiness. He whose desires cease is immortal. Even if he stays in the world, he is free from its bondage and attains realization of Brahman, the Ultimate Reality. Such sages are few and far between. Prakasananda was one such immortal sage. Born in Andhra, he achieved the stature of a great sage in Gujarat, Saurashtra, Kutch and Rajasthan. An Avadhuta he passed away there itself. We know very little about his premonastic life. In a village in the region of Vizianagaram in Visakhapatnam district there lived a Brahmin couple Meenakshamma and Lakshmi Narasimham. Venkatramayya was their son and Gauramma was their daughter-in-law. Anantayya was Gauramma and Venkataramayya's son. Anantayya is the premonastic name of Prakasananda. Anantayya had a sister, Ramanujamma. Anantayya's father died when he was only 8 years old. And his mother too passed away when he was 19 years old. His grandparents looked after him and he studied up to 3rd form. At the age of 15, Anantayya gave up school education and started learning Sanskrit and Astrology. The grandparents tried to get Anantayya married and an alliance was also agreed upon. But shortly after, the prospective bride died. Before the bondage of marriage could enslave Anantayya, it snapped. Dattayya Pantulu, a great Vedantist, taught English to Anantayya. He noticed the fiery flame of renunciation and the thirst for wisdom in Anantayya. But when Anantayya decided to leave home in quest of God, Dattayya dissuaded him saying, "A proper guru will come, himself, when the time is ripe."

Anantayya had an officer in the army as a friend. His wife was exceptionally beautiful. But delivering a child, she developed complications and died. Anantayya went to the burial ground. The sight of a young, beautiful woman, within no time, getting reduced to a heap of ashes, rekindled the flame of renunciation in Anantayya. His resolve to leave home was strengthened. And he left home at the age of 16. On 14.1.1887,

he reached Belgaum. There he came into contact with the deputy collector of the town, Lallubhai Govardhandas. He was a great Vedantist and preceptor. Lallubhai was born in Surat and was a Gujarati Vaisya. He lived the life of a man of steadfast wisdom (Sthithaprajna). Anantayya studied Vedantic texts like *Yoga Vasishtha* with him. He then had a powerful impulse to renounce. Lallubhai told him about the untold difficulties of a life of renunciation but Anantayya was a man of inflexible determination. With the permission of his guru, he now undertook a pilgrimage and reached Tirumala. He took bath in the sacred tank and discarded the insignia of Brahmins; the tuft and sacred thread uttering the needed sacred syllables. From Tirupati he went to Madras and studied the Upanishads, with commentaries, under Bucchayya Pantulu. For some time he grew a beard but got rid of it soon. From Madras he went to Nasik and on the way to Hardwar he studied *Siddhanta Kaumudi*, the most important classical grammar text under the eminent grammarian Amaresananda. It was Amaresananda who conferred on him the monastic name of Prakasananda. From then onwards Anantayya became Prakasananda Swami.

At Rishikesh, Prakasananda learnt Hathayoga technique from Sri Sukhananda Swami. Then he went to Nadiad in Gujarat and studied the text *Vrittiprabhakara* under Swami Janakidas staying in the local Sant Ram temple. He also studied other texts with a scholar named Ramanujam. Even after becoming a monk Prakasananda kept in touch with his first guru Lallubhai and used to visit him wherever he was posted. He listened to his teachings with the same interest and intensity he had earlier. Lallubhai, on his part, treated Prakasananda with all the respect due to a monk. In this way, Prakasananda served his guru Lallubhai for 15 years. He passed away when Prakasananda was 32 years old. Prakasananda lived his life without touching money and begged his food. Very wealthy devotees and rulers of states came forward to build an Ashram for him but he refused. The rulers of Hamsada and Morabi wanted to spend time with the Swami continuously and for that purpose volunteered to build Ashrams. As usual the Swami stalled any

such move. A great renunciate, wherever he went, the Swami stayed in a burial ground or a dilapidated temple or simply under the shade of a tree. Hundreds of devotees and admirers imbibed his nectarean teachings. At the age of 40, Prakasananda achieved self-realization. During those days he wore black colored clothes. His entire belongings consisted of a torn, hole-filled quilt and a clay pot. Since he moved about as a childish, madman, people used to call him "Godadiya Swami (i.e. a Swami with a quilt and a pot.)

Disciples narrate many incidents to prove that the Swami had omniscient powers. A Professor of Sanskrit in a college in Bhavnagar was the Swami's disciple. His birthplace was the Nadiad. When the Swamji visited Bhavnagar, the Professor had his darshan. Then the Swam asked him, "Are all doing well? Did you get any letter from your home?" The Professor said that he did not receive any letter but his people were doing well. The Swami told him that in a couple of days he was going to Nadiad and he was sure to visit his home. The Professor did not understand the import of the Swami's visit to his place. By the time, the Swami reached Nadiad and went to the place, his six-month old son was stricken with small pox. The Swami counselled the Professor's wife about the impermanence of the body and the necessity to be free from attachment to the body. The wife asked him whether it was proper, when her son was suffering from the dreadful disease small pox, to give her such a teaching. The Swami told her that he would return in a couple of days and asked her to show him the boy then. By the time the Swami returned the child died. The disciples believed that the Swami was an incarnation of God and was born with the amsa of Eswara. When the Sanskrit Professor had darshan of the Swami on the Sivaratri day, he saw the Holy Trident (Trisul) on the Swami's forehead. The Swami used to do intense meditation on Pranava staying in a room near Viswanatha, Nandiswara temple in Dwaraka. At that time the disciples had darshan of Omkara on his forehead. Though he had miraculous powers, he never showed them. But sometimes, moved by deep compassion for the

disciples, he relieved them of chronic diseases. He also taught them the way of achieving both secular and spiritual well-being.

Prakasananda Swami was compassionate towards all beings. He suffered whenever people had economic or social problems. He practised the principle of equality and warned his rich disciples not to amass more money than they needed. He advised them to give up selfishness and do socially productive work. He advised rulers not to impose too many taxes on people and exploit them. Once the Maharaja of Morabi contracted a fatal disease. Ever compassionate Prakasananda visited Morabi and blessed him. For six months he stayed in Morabi, until the Maharaja regained his health. The Maharaja who escaped the jaws of death by the blessings of the Swami gave him a lakh of rupees and asked him to spend it for charitable purposes. The Swami did not even look at the stacks of money placed before him. He simply asked the ruler to exempt the farmers, who were reeling under a drought that year, from taxes. The Maharaja did accordingly and the total amount he exempted was 20 lakhs. The Swami had such overwhelming compassion for suffering humanity. He had great affection for children who used to address him as Dada (grandfather). They used to surround him and the Swami delighted in telling them stories and entertaining them. He used to joke with them and speak funnily. Though the Swami followed the Advaita philosophy, he respected all the religions and conventions of Indian culture. He showed respect to Islam and Christianity and his conversations were full of stories from the Bible and Khoran. He used to declare often that the aim of all religions is realization of the Supreme God. Besides his study of books, the Swami's travels and association with Sadhus gave him enormous worldly knowledge. He used to give, regularly, discourses on Vedanta Philosophy. Among the celebrated persons who were recipients of the Swami's respect and affection are : 1) Sarayu Das of Ahmedabad. The Swami saw him in the year 1900. He used to stay in Prem Darwaja area of Ahmedabad. Prakasananda often had spiritual discussions with him. 2) Narayana Das of Kutch. The Swami met him in 1899. Narayana Das was more than 70 years old at that time. He used

to go only by walk anywhere, however long the distance was. 3) Janaki Das of Charotar. 4) Nityananda Swami of Pithadiya. All the four were renowned as sages but none had any ashram. Of the four, Nityananda Swami was very close to Prakasananda.

Before he took Sanyas, Nityananda was known as Ramprasad. He was born in a pious family in 1866, at Parikshitgadhi near Meerat. His father was Ramakrishna Pant. He lost his parents in childhood itself and his grandfather brought him up and got him educated. At a very young age Ramprasad was inspired by a spirit of intense renunciation. Once he went to Chitrakut for satsang (gathering of sadhakas). In the presence of a Mahatma called Siddhaji, he did 24 lakhs japa of the Gayatri mantra. He studied sastras in Kasi, visited innumerable pilgrim centres. In 1889, he decided to stay in Thramba near Rajkot, on the banks of the river Banaganga. Ramprasad was a worshipper of Salagrama. But Mahatma Jagannadha Swami taught the Formless Mode of worship- Nirgunopasana. As Jagannadha Swami was not a Brahmin he advised Ramprasad to take initiation from Kapilananda Swami, on his way to Bhavnagar at a place called Sihora. Ramprasad took initiation from Kapilananda Swami and was given the name Nityananda Saraswati. He was then 27 years old. Nityananda was a complete, unconditional renunciate, tyagi. For some time he ate only leaves and twigs and did intense tapas. In a village called Amsodar, near Lathi town he gave discourses on the Vedanta philosophy for a long time. Thousands of people worshipped him as a guru. In 1909, at the request of ruler of Moolwala, Nityananda Swami stayed in Pithadiya for some time. Nityananda met Prakasananda for the first time at Rajkot in 1912. Their friendship grew ever since. They used to meet in Pithadiya and hold discussion on the spiritual aspects of life. In 1934, listening to the bhajans and Pranavanada, in the presence of Prakasananda Nityananda attained Mahasamadhi.

Prakasananda wrote many books containing instructions about the spiritual path. Among these books, the foremost book to be mentioned is *Varatalapa*. This book is a testimony to the great scholarship and

awareness of the subtleties of Brahmailidya. *Vartalapa* is the essence of 35 discourses that the Swami made in the presence of Nityananda and many devotees. It is a big book of 1031 pages. This is a book which incorporates insights from the srutis, smritis, Upanishads, Puranas, Ithihasas, 101 in number. He wove wonderful stories in between with plenty of examples couched in a simple reader-friendly style. The disciples took down the discourses of the Swami given in a mixture of Hindi and Gujarati. The disciples showed what they took down to the Swami rewrote it, and got it printed in Gujarati. By 1965 itself it went into 8 reprints in Gujarati alone. The queen mother of Sirhoi was (Takhatkumariba) a devotee of the Swami. She wanted that the book should be available to Andhra readers also. She consulted a Gujarati gentlemen, G.R. Trivedi staying in Rajahmundry and an Andhra scholar who knew Hindi, Telugu and Sanskrit was brought to Dwaraka and providing him with all facilities, she got the book translated into Telugu in 4 months. The queen mother then sent the money needed for printing to Trivedi. The 1032-pages Telugu edition came out in 1965.

This remarkable book deserves to be read every day like the *Bhagavad Gita*. It was distributed free of cost to all. The translator must have been a remarkable man to have hidden his name and remain anonymous. He must have been a person of rare merit. The translation was checked by Vasa Appanna Sastri who was Trivedi's neighbour. The Telugu people are greatly indebted to these people. Prakasananda's other writings are : 1) *Santguru Parichayam*, 2) *Apano dharma (Our Dharma)* 3) *Dharma Jyoti* 4) *Saptasloki Gita*. These books were printed in the Gujarati language. It is said that the letters between the Swami and his disciples still remain unpublished. The Swami wrote in Telugu script, Telugu and Gujarati language. During the last days of his life, all this was in the Telugu script. When the disciples asked how do we get to know what is in the Telugu script, the Swami said that a competent person from Andhra, would come and do the job.

The 35 discourses of Vartalapa contain subjects such as Vedanta, Brahma *vidya*, dharma and aspects of various religious traditions.

Occasionally, we also find matters regarding the contemporaries of Prakasananda and Nityananda. When Prakasananda Swami went for the darshan of Nityananda Swami staying in Pithadiya the Maharaja of Pithadiya came for Prakasananda's darshan. Along with him was Vaidyaraja Gopalji. When the Maharaja offered him gifts, Prakasananda refused to accept them. He explained the subtle spiritual truth behind the non-acceptance of gifts. When the Vaidyaraj asked Nityananda about the tattered clothes Prakasananda wore, Nityananda Swami told him that they represent the state of the Avadhuta. Once Pithadiya Maharaj invited Prakasananda Swami to come to the capital, the Swami replied. "I will go to the forest but not to the darbars". After staying with Nityananda for some time Prakasananda left for Junagadh. When he was about to leave, a servant of the Maharaja came and put some coins in the clay pot of the Swami. The Swami turned the pot upside down and throwing away the coins, asked the devotees to wash the pot with water since it was defiled by the touch of money. After sanyas, Prakasananda went to Madras. He met Gurulinga Sastri and Venkata Raghava Sastri whom he knew from his premonastic days. At that time Gurulinga Sastri was engaged in the printing of the Telugu translations of 7 Sanskrit commentaries on the Gita. And Venkata Raghava Sastri was engaged in translating Panchadasi into Telugu. Once when the Swami was on his way to Pithadiya from Jamnagar to have darshan of Nityananda, Triambak Bhai went along with him. Triambak was the son of Dr. Veeraji. He had T.B. while studying in Bombay for his B.A. degree. His desire was to study Vendanta all the time. His father made all arrangements in this regard. At the residence of Nityananda, it so happened that Triambak Bhai was having intense pain in the legs. At that time there was no one around and Nityananda started pressing his legs to induce some relief. Prakasananda who saw this, compared Nityananda to Buddha Bhagavan. Once when Dr. Veerajibhai met Prakasananda Swami in the presence of Nityananda, it came to be known that both of them knew each other for the last 25 years. During the days when Prakasananda was in Belgaum doing service

to Lallubhai, plague broke out in the area. Dr. VeerajiBhai came to give his medical service to the patients and stayed as a guest of Lallubhai. In another context Dr. Veeraji was leaving for Jamnagar after spending some days in the holy company of Nityananda and Prakasananda. The devoted doctor took a piece of cloth from Prakasananda's tom quilt as token of memory. Then Prakasananda told the story of a monk whose beard and moustache were plucked by devotees as a token of the monk's memory. All the listeners Iqughed uproariously.

Once when Prakasananda was travelling from Gondal to Pithadiya to have darshan of Nityananda, Dr. Raghavji Bhai accompanied the Swami. Nityananda himself, brought a tumbler of water to Prakasananda for washing his feet. When Prakasananda protested that there were many servants to do such job, Nityananda shouldnotdo such things, Nityananda told a story. When the servant maids asked Rukmini why she should take the trouble of serving Krishna, when they themselves were all there to do everything, Rukmini replied that it was she who married Sri Krishna and not the servant maids. Once Prakasananda was stuck in Jethpur, unable to walk even and not having enough money to engage a cart, he wrote a letter to Nityananda requesting him to come to Jethpur and give his darshan. Nityananda came to Jethpur from Pithadiya. Dr. Gopalbhai was with him. By the time he arrived, Prakasananda was sitting in the dust and dirt outside the Gymkhana club. Those who came to see him were also sitting in the same way.

In 1901 Prakasananda went to Jamanagar. A Dravida Swami there told Prakasananda that there was a great sage living in another part of the town. His name was Mastram Maharaj. He was the Mahatma who refused to take Rs. 5000/- given by the Maharaja of Bhavanagar. He exemplified total detachment. While Prakasananda was in Gondal Mohanbhai, Sastri Revasnkarbhai and Chandubhai came there for his darshan. They all went to Pithadiya for satsang with Nityananda. Sastri Revasankarbhai worked in Rajkumar college and Sansakrit College in Rajkot. When he was a young man, he desired to remain a celibate and

with that intention went away to Kasi. But his sister brought him back forcefully from Kasi. Heeding to the advice of Prakasananda, he became a householder. Once when a sage Narayana Paramahansa by name came to Rajkot, Prakasananda had his darshan. After two years when Prakasananda was travelling from Chandoda to Kamali, he heard from his companions that a great sage was living in Hanumantheswar. They all went to see the sage and he was none other than Narayana Paramahansa. Since he was then having panchasikhas, Prakasananda could not recognize him. But Narayana Paramahansa recognised him. When the Sage saw two sticks with Prakasananda, he asked him why he was carrying two sticks, instead of one. Prakasananda replied that he had not transcended dualism, yet. Then the Paramahansa snatched one of the two and asked him, "Has Advaita now become fixed?" Prakasananda from then on carried only one stick.

Once when Prakasananda Swami was in Gondal, Professor Mahadevamalhar Joshi came from Junagadh and had his darshan. He then invited him to Junagadh. The Swami said he would have darshan of Nityananda at Pithadia and then come to Junagadh. The Professor also went with him to Junagadh and enjoyed the conversation between the two great sages. Returning from Junagadh, Prakasananda stayed in a choultry outside Jethpur. To have his darshan Nitayananda, Sankarananda the Maharaja, Dr. Lallubhai and Prabhasankarbhai-all-went to the resthouse. The Maharaja was a modest, righteous person. In a discourse Prakasananda spoke about a contemporary sage by name Ramjibhai. "With the compulsion and firmness of his wife, Namdev became a great devotee. Such devotees are there even now and Ramjibhai is one. He was a resident of Jamnagar. He worked as a head clerk in the police department. He was inspired by reading the *Bhagavatha* and became devotee. He heard *Bhagavata* Katha for a week at the instance of a friend. As a result the total tenor of his life changed. He became a great devotee comparable to Tukaram, and Narsi Mehta. His superior, the police superintendent, was a European. Once when this officer was leaving Jamnagar on transfer, he fell at the feet of Ramji Bhai praising him as the

great man who had brought about a tremendous change in his life. Such a great one was Ramjibhai."

Once when Prakasananda went to Hamsada, the Maharaja of that region came to the place where the Swami was staying and had his darshan. He also had discussion on Vedanta Philosophy with him. When an unprecedented, severe famine came in 1899, the Swami undertook the vow of Four Month-Stay (Chatrumas Vrata) in Bhuj. Once the Maharaja of Hamsada asked Prakasananda whether there were any genuine monks in these days: The Swami said that "Nityananda who lives in Pithadiya was one such great master. After a year, the Maharaja visited Prakasananda, who was at that time staying in a cottage on the way to Vaghji Bhai Sarovar, again. Seeing a photograph in that cottage, the Maharaja asked the Swami whose photo it was. Prakasananda told him that it was the photo of Nityananda. Immediately, the Maharaja requested the Swami to take him to Pithadiya which was 42 miles away. The ruler had darshan of Nityananda and declared that he was blessed to have his darshan. Nityananda was a sage of uncommon eminence but appeared as an ordinary man. Once when Prakasananda was staying at Jethpur Damajibhai went there and brought him to Rajkot. Mohanbhai and Sankarbhai accompanied the Swami. They started for Rajkot at 5 'o clock in the evening, stopped at Pithadiya to have darshan of Nityananda and had conversed with him. Hearing about the sickness of Nityananda, Prakasananda went to Pithadiya. When Nityananda said that he desired to give up his body at Hardwar, Prakasananda said: "Why go to Hardwar? All the great sacred rivers like Ganga are at your feet!". Nityananda gave up his idea to go to Hardwar. On Phalguna Shuddha Pournami Nityananda passed away. Though Nityananda and Prakasananda had separate bodies, their way of talking, their qualities and the radiance of their self were one. They had intense mutual respect. Their discourses and *Vartalapa* are nectar to us.

Prakasananda realised much before he attained Siddhi when that will happen. He decided to give up his body at Dwaraka, the most sacred pilgrim center in the whole of India. On 15.1.1962, he came to Dwaraka

from Jamnagar. He was 92 years old. He stayed in the compound of the house belonging to Sri Tulsidas Haridas. In the compound there was a Viswanath temple and the Swami stayed in a room near the temple. His daily activities were to review the Vedantic treatises he wrote, writing answers to seekers and disciples and doing intense meditation on Viswanath. A child was born in the house of the householder who gave the Swami his devoted hospitality. Nine days before the Swami gave up the body (15.2.1962), the child was brought to the Swami and he was requested to give the child a name. Looking at the infant, the Swami said : "I am giving my own name to this child. Reverse my name and call him 'Anand Prakash'. "From now onwards, I don't need the name. This is the last namkaran, naming ceremony." On 19.2.1961, he asked Madhuriben - Tulsidas's sister-to bring him some ochre coloured powder and declared that it was necessary for him now to wear ochre robes. Madhuriben worshiped the Swami as God Himself. The Swami told Haridas that his body should be thrown into the sea. The Swami became sick on Thursday, 22.2.1962. News of this was sent to disciples and devotees. All of them arrived. The next day-Friday-the Swami appeared some-what recovered. Many devotees and disciples thought that the Swami's health has improved and went back to their native places. The Swami took some tiffin on 23.2.62, around 12 'o clock. The Swami looked at the devotees who surrounded him and smiled. Seeing the Swami smiling, the others also smiled. The Swami cracked his fingers and said "Chalo!" (Let's go). The time was 12.20 and that very minute the crown and the earrings (Kundalas) adorning Bhagavan Krishna, in the temple, costing two crores of rupees, suddenly came off, and fell to the ground. They all wondered what terrible calamity it was. They later realised that the Swami said "Chalo" ("let us go") to the divine personages who came to him. The Swami gave up his body, lying in the hands of Manubhai Deekshit, and Durgasankar Rawal who were sitting by his side. The Swami's Self merged in the Supreme Self.

Telegrams were sent to distant places conveying the news of the Swami's passing away. Thousands and thousands of devotees and

disciples rushed to the spot, travelling by trains; air, cars, and carts. The Swami's body, remained, it seemed, alive (warm) for 24 hours. His body was placed in a palanquin and taken around the town, carried by Shanti Prasad Mahant, Swami Hariharasarma, Poojya Prem Bikshuki.

Obsequies were performed according to tradition. They lowered the Swami's body into a boat, and as per his wish, they placed it gently into the sea at the place where Gomathi merges into it. (Gomathi Sangama Sthana). Prakasananda Swami passed away on 23.2.1962 (Plava Year, Magha Bahulas Chavithi).

Though Prakasananda Swami's physical body is no more, his power and grace are felt by devotees and disciples even now. The articles and utensils he used are kept safely in the very room where he attained siddhi. Madhuriben used to give arati and other items of worship. For the Swami's disciples, it is a place, holy and sacred, a great pilgrim center. One example is given to show his great power. Haridas, Madhuriben's father, was operated upon for cancer. But there was no chance of his survival. However, the Swami declared that he will live. He lived for a long time. After the Swami's passing away, due to some obstruction in the throat, Haridas could not swallow even a drop of water. He was taken to "Okha" hospital twenty five miles away. But the doctors, after examining him, suggested that he should be taken to the Tata Cancer Hospital. They made preparations to leave for Bombay but brought him to Dwaraka again. Madhuriben then placed a glass of water on the altar of the Swami and gave it to her father to drink. He drank without any obstruction in the throat. He also took food. However, they took him to the hospital in Bombay. The doctors who examined him declared that there was no problem. The devotees realized that the Swami's great Yogic power continues to be effective, even when he was physically not alive.

The biography given above is found, briefly, in the beginning of the Swami's book *Vartalapa*. But, we are told, that the Swami's comprehensive biographies are available in Gujarati. It would be wonderful to have his comprehensive biography in Telugu also.

Look at the following passage which highlights the great personality of the Swami;

"If there are any mistakes in what I am saying, like Tukaram Maharaj I seek forgiveness from you all. O Panduranga! I am unable to bear the sight of man drowning in the ocean of samsara. My heart is sinking with agony. Even after knowing God is omnipresent, censuring has become a habit. I am not able to refrain from showing compassion even when I see the entire world in the jaws of death. Hence, some feel troubled when their ostentation and pride are exposed. They may think that I am a wicked person, indeed, an atheist. I pray to all of them to forgive me."

Source:

Varatalapamu (Telugu translation) published by Z. T. R. Trivedi.
Rajahmundry-1; 24-1-1965.

33. KAVYAKANTHA VASISHTHA

GANAPATI MUNI (NAYANA)

(1878 - 1936)

India's independence emerged out of the collective consciousness which had registered in the political, social, educational, ethical, and spiritual fields. Several great persons of Himalayan stature played crucial roles in those fields. It is their collected effort that brought freedom to India, an end to its slavery. Some worked in a particular field. Some were multifaceted in their genius and left their mark in several areas. Among such multifaceted personalities, Kavyakantha is the most significant. In the spiritual field he was a great yogi, a Siddhapurusha, a great master. In the field of dharma he was easily comparable to the Vedic rishis. In the fields of education, literature and scholarship he was, among his contemporaries a unique figure. In the social arena, he initiated several revolutionary changes. In the political scenarios of the time, he was General Secretary of the Tamil region National Congress and as such had the courage to dissent from Gandhiji himself and leave the congress.

In a village called Kaluvarayi three miles from Bobbli, Visakhapatnam district, there lived Bhima Sastri whose family surname was Ayyala Somayajula. He belonged to the Arama Dravida sect and his eldest son was Narasimha Sastri who worshipped Ganesha as his Chosen Deity. His wife Narasamma was a worshipper of Surya. The devout couple were filled with an intense longing to reestablish the Sanatana Dharma, went to Arasavalli to perform the tonsuring ceremony of their first son Bhima Sastri. This was on 9-2-1878. They spent the day, fasting, discharged their vows and prayed to the sun god to bless them with another son who will devote himself to the service and regeneration of the country. They rested at night and Narasamma had a dream. Hiranmayi, the Supreme Sakti of the sun God appeared in Narasamma's dream, and gave her a golden vessel filled to the brim with a celestial fire. Very soon Narasamma became pregnant and

went to her parents' place for delivery. Narasimha Sastri went to Banars and began doing worship of Dunthi Ganapati. One afternoon, he saw a child emerging from the image of Ganesha and walking towards him. This was 17th November, 1878. (Bahudhanya year, Kartika, Bahulashtami, Sunday, Makha Star). At the same time Narasamma gave birth to a male child. The mother saw a divine aura pervading the child. The parents named the child as Surya Ganapati Sastri, after their Chosen Deity. Later, Narasamma gave birth to Annapoorna and Sivarama Sastri. Three years later she died. Ganapati was 10 years old and he foretold his mother's death.

Surya Ganapathi, the child they regarded as the gift of the gods was not able to speak until he was six years old. One day Narasimha Sastri touched the "nerveknot" - Nadi bandha - of the child with a red hot iron. Instantly, the pool of speech sprang into being. Surya Ganapati studied kavyas with his uncle Prakasa Sastri, until he was ten years old. He also achieved excellence in the calculation of panchanga. At the age of 12 Ganapati was married to Visalakshi, born in Karra vamsa. Ganapati wrote *Bhringa duta* Kavya in two sargas. By his 18th year Ganapati mastered Grammar, Aesthetics, Literature, Treatises and epics. From his 13th year itself he did sadhana in many mahamantras such as Panchakshari Medha-Dakshinamutri, Narayanastakshari, Sourashtrashtakshari, Chandinavakshari, Matangi, Bala, Varahi, Bhuvaneshwari, Mahaganapati, Panchadasi, Shodasi. The desire to do tapas, going away to some solitary place, became insistent. Accordingly he gave word to his father that he will stay with his wife for six months and for another six months he would stay in holy places. After giving birth to two children, his wife Visalakshi, also asked that she should be allowed to do tapas. Ganapati Sastri initiated her into Maha Ganapati mantra and Srividya. The couple was comparable to the Vedic rishi couples of yore.

In 1896 Ganapati did severe tapas for two months in Peramma Agraharam on the coast of Kausiki. He started for Kasi and honored by the officer of the Dharmasala of Nandigram, he returned home.

One day when he was meditating, a person with a big white beard appeared in a vision and told him: " I am your companion in penance (tapas). My name is Bhadraka. You are Ganaka". With the permission of his father, Ganapati went to Prayag on 18.11.1897 and did tapas for some days in Hamsa Teertha. Then he reached Kasi and stayed with his father's uncle Bhavani Sankaram. With his poetic talent he impressed Siva Kumar Pandit of the Darbhanga Samsthan. The Pandit advised him to go to Navadwip for the conference of Pandits being held there and gave a letter of introduction to the secretary of the Conference. One day Somayajula Suryanarayana Yogi appeared before Ganapati and told him: "Beginning with Bhadraka, we are 18 born for the welfare of the world. I am Suketu. You are Ganaka. The work assigned to you will be revealed by Sthula Siras." Revealing this the Yogi left. Ganapati received an intuitive prompting to do tapas at Nasik. He therefore went there and did tapas for 14 days. It was there that he did Ashtavadhana for the first time. He cursed the priest Lakshmanalaya who humiliated him in Nasik and did terrifying tapas for 72 days in Navachuti. It was there that a naked, white complexioned person appeared and asked him to return home. Ganapati accordingly returned to Kaluvarayi and stayed for some months. Visalakshi became pregnant.

Then Ganapati went to Bhuvaneshwar and did tapas for 9 days. On the last day, Goddess Bhuaneswari appeared and gave him honey in a golden cup. From that day onwards, his intelligence was sharpened and the sweetness of his poetry doubled. On 14.2.1899 Visalakshamma gave birth to a son. He was named Mahadeva. Ganapati mastered Tarka, Vedanta, Vyakarana and Mahabhashya as well as the science of ethics during his stay in Kesanakurru and Kaluvarayi. In 1900 he did Ashtavadhana in the presence of the ruler of Mandasa, defeated the ruler's guru, initiated the ruler's son into Siva Panchakshari and with the support of the Mandasa ruler proceeded to Navadwip. He became close to the Secretary, Sitikantha Vachaspati with the letter of introduction he got earlier in Kasi. The examiner that year of the Pandit's conference was Ambika Dutt who was renowned in the north of India as the most

distinguished figure in composing poetry extempore, (Asukavita) and was known for his outstanding scholarship. Ganapati did not know who he was and asked him: "Who are you?" The Pandit replied giving his name but with its implied meaning: i.e. he is Ambika Datta: the adopted son of Goddess Ambika. Then Ganapati introduced himself implying that if he was the adopted child, he himself was son of the full blood-Ganapati. Ganapati came out with flying colors as one with no peer in that conference and impressed all the scholars there with his spontaneous poetic talent and profound scholarship. The council of scholars honored Ganapati conferring on him the honorific title Kavya Kantha. This was on 20.06.1900. This event is something which every Andhra feels proud of.

Ganapati did tapas for some days in Vaidyanath and was initiated into the "Tara" mantra by Suresh Mishra and achieved perfection in that. (In fact, it was Ganapati who brought the mantra to south India). On the 10th day, Siva appeared in his dream at night and showed him the path to liberation, sprinkled vibhuti on him and vanished. Ganapati was greatly respected by the Maharaja of Garhwal and for three months did tapas in Kanpur. But heeding to a message from his father, he returned home. He stayed for 15 months and arranged for a treatment of his father's eyes which got impaired. In March 1902 Ganapati along with his wife went to Mandasa and received the hospitality of its ruler. Then he asked his wife to go back. Then along with his brother Sivarama Sastri he did penance at Bhuvaneshwar. Later he visited Dantavani and Calcutta, he returned to South India. He did tapas on Sivapanchakashari for some time in the region midway between the two rivers Ksheeravati and Vegavati. He with the encouragement of his disciple and astrologer Narayana, KavyaKantha went to Arunachala and worshipped Apeetha Kuchamba and Arunachaleswara. He realised that Arunachalam was the place where all his penance-Tapas- will fructify. But the two brothers found it very difficult to get food and a place to stay. Ganapati was angry with the local deities. Instantly a Brahmin came and invited them to take prasada at the ritual vrata his wife was performing. They took the prasada and rested also there. When they woke up in the morning, they saw that

the house had vanished and they were in the compound of a Ganapati temple. This was not a dream. They still retained traces of the betel leaves they ate. They realised that the presiding deities of Arunachala - Apeethakuchamba and Arunachaleswara - themselves gave them this feast on their completing 5 crores of chanting of the "Siva Panchakshari" mantra. They were Siva and Parvati themselves! And this man was Ganapati! Declaring that one should beg Parameswara (Siva) Himself for food rather than the local people, Kavyakantha composed, in 1902, a thousand-verse hymn "*Harasthuthi*" in praise of Siva. He used to stand every day in front of the Nandi and read out "*Harasthuthi*" slokas to Siva. The citizens who listened to Ganapati's reading were wonder struck at his genius. On the last day Ramana Maharshi and Seshadri Swami (who were like the sun and the moon of the Arunachala sky) listened to Kavyakantha slokas and felt immense delight. Kavyakantha, later, got the job of a Sanskrit teacher in the local school. In 10 days he learnt Tamil and taught Sanskrit through the Tamil medium. In 1903 he had darshan of Brahmana Swami as Ramana Maharshi was called in those days-on Arunachala hill. When he saw him he realised that Brahmana Swami was the same Sthula Siras that was foretold by the Durgamandir yogi and did namaskar to him. Ramanamaharshi was at that time 22 years old and Kavyakantha 25 years. This was all that happened at that time.

Kavyakantha studied the Vedas for one year and read Sayana's commentary on those texts. Kavyakanth's fame spread in every nook and corner of Tamilnadu. In Madras, he won appreciation for his poetic talent and scholarship from stalwarts like Panchapakesa Sastri, Vedam Venkataraya Sastri, Rangaiah Naidu and others. The number of persons who came to have his darshan swelled day by day. Many became his disciples. One day a disciple by name Doraiswami narrated the story of Shakespeare's tragic drama *Macbeth*. Immediately Kavyakantha composed it as a Sanskrit Kavya (poem) extempore. When another disciple read the English newspaper, Kavyakantha who could retain in his infallible memory whatever he heard only once (this kind of gifted person is called Ekasanthagrahi) the English sentences

he heard from beginning to end and end to beginning repeated without a mistake and, that to effortlessly. Those who heard were struck with wonder. Kavyakantha was honored in the presence of one of the greatest scholars of that time, Vedam Venkataraya Sastri, in a school in Tiruvallikkeni area of Madras. He also defeated a great scholar who was honored by the titles Bhattasri and Balasarasvati, in debate and was honoured with a golden anklet.

Kavyakantha gathered his former birth students into a group and on Madras beach used to discuss plans for the regeneration of the enslaved country. He exhorted the young group that the country's welfare could be achieved only through four ideals becoming realities: Karma yoga, the way of life of vedic rishis, sages, reactivating every household with mantras, without any distinction and differences between man and woman, caste and creed, etc. What he told Rangaiah Naidu is a source of pride for the entire India that is Bharat: "I am always meditating on the glory and progress of the country!" he said. How much he must have suffered at the pitiable condition of the country! He worked as a Telugu Pandit in Christian College at Vellore and lived there with his family. This was in 1904. He gave initiation-Mantra Deeksha-to many men and women. Narasimham Dr. Saravepalli Radhakrishnan's uncle, was among those who received initiation from Kavyaknatha. Later Narasimham renounced the world, became a sanyasi by name "Pranavananda". As a result of Kavyakantha's lectures on the greatness and enduring values of Vedic religion and Philosophy, the false propaganda of preachers of other relig lessened. Among the Hindus, admiration and respect for their own religion increased. Ganapati established an organization called "Indra Sangha" and initiated its members with the mantra "Umam Vande Matharam".Expectedly, the government employed, some people to spy on him. On 17.2.1907 Kavyakantha had a dream, in the early hours of the day, in which Bhadraka appeared and told him that his life's journey was over. He also cautioned him to remain alert since, because of Kavyaknatha's remendous tapas, there will be shock waves in society. Bhadraka then vanished. Kavya Kantha's sorrow was acute as if he had lost his own

brother and after taking a ritual bath, he offered the ritualistic rice-balls (pinda) to the departed one. Next day the news came that Bhadraka was none other than Colonel Olcott, a distinguished pioneer of the Theosophical Society.

Kavyakantha then took his father on a pilgrimage to Kasi. In the meantime news reached them that his (Kavyakantha's) son, Mahadeva, was stricken with small pox. Ganapati immediately left for Vellore and propitiating the terrifying goddess Marichi, got the small pox cured. For the Dasara holidays, he went with his family to Padaiveedu and had the darshan of Renuka Devi. With a burning desire to do tapas, he gave up his job and reached Tiruvannamalai on 3.11.1907. Kavyakantha did taps for some time in Markata Syamambika (also called "Pacchiamman") temple and for some more days in Nairuthalingasthala. By that time, the Krittikotsva celebrations of Arunachaleswara began. On the 7th day the deity's chariot stopped, in the middle of the procession, without budging an inch. Any number of men tried to move it. but all in vain. Next morning, intuitively inspired by the command of Ishwara, Kavya Kantha approached the chariot and offered prayers. The chariot started moving. When the big crowd started looking for the person who miraculously made the stranded ratha move, Ganapati was to be found nowhere.

He simply vanished. Braving the midday sun, he went to have darshan of the Brahmana Swami then staying in the Virupaksha cave. The Swami was alone sitting on a small rock. Ganapati fell at his feet and confessing that he couldn't succeed in his tapas, he surrendered to him. He beseeched him to instruct him in the nature of tapas. The Brahmana Swami who remained silent so far broke it and told Ganapati directing his compassionate looks at him; " If we know from where the awareness of 'I' comes, mind will merge in that itself. That itself is tapas. While doing japa if one observes from where the sound of the mantra-comes, the mind will merge in itself and that itself is tapas." This teaching was given on 18.11.1906. Ganapati realized that this was the essence of Vedanta, prostrated to the Brahmana Swami and asked him to give permission to meditate in the

Maharshi's presence. Brahmana Swami told him to go and meditate inside the cave. Ganapati meditated for an hour in the cave, and realized that the Brahmana Swami was God Himself who incarnated to revitalize this method of meditation which was overshadowed for a longtime. He then named the Brahmana Swami as "Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi." The residents of Arunachala realized that Ganapati made the Brahmana Swami who remained silent all along, (and known, hence as Mouna Swami speak for the first time. There from , they declared, Ganapati was an extraordinary person, himself. Ganapati immediately wrote a hymn "*Ramanapanchakam*" in praise of Bhagavan read it out to him and when he offered it to him as his gift a disciple to him as his guru, Ramana Maharshi accepted it saying ; " All right, Nayana I" From that day onwards, the name "Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi" for Mouna Swami and the name "Nayana" for Ganapati became current in use. The people in the South call Ganapati Nayana. People in Arunachala realized that it was the same person who made the chariot move the day before now succeeded in making the Mouna Swami speak. Realizing this wonderful event they prostrated before the Mouna Swami and Nayana. Later Nayana revealed his past lives and told them that this was his seventh birth, the first being Vrishakapi. From that day onwards another birth began for Nayana. Under the protection of Ramana Maharshi he began undertaking multifarious activities such as writing of many invaluable books, tapas, pilgrimages, the propagation of vedic and Varnasrama dharma, study, Vanaprastha, giving discourses, inspiring his disciples, and vanquishing egoistic scholars in debates.

Along with 30 disciples, Visalakshamma came to Arunachala for the "Deepotsava". Seeing her Ramana Maharshi declared "mother has come." Nayana, too, addressed her as "Mother". She also, in turn, called him "Nayana". From that day onwards they began the "Vanaprastha" phase of their life. She surrendered her self to Ramana Maharshi. Nayana initiated her with Tara mantra. Nayana, doing tapas in Chootha cave, decided that he should write a book by name *Uma Sahasram* in 20 days (26.11.1907) The writing stopped falling short of 250 slokas. Ramana

Maharshi sat behind both physically and in a subtle way in his heart, psychologically. Then Nayana dictated to 5 scribes - 50 slokas each- and completed the work. From Maharshi's heart the spring of creativity flowed into Nayana and came out in the form of slokas from his mouth. At the behest of Ramana, Kavya Kantha lived on top of the mountain in "Saptajhari" and acquired the occult powers of precognition and clairvoyance. In a "Ritual Fire"-Homajwala-a person by name Chirupakam Kondayya saw Nayana's divine form. Nayana recognised Ramana Maharshi as Shanmukha or Skanda. Nayana now recognized him as the "Sthula Siras" spoken of by Suketu in Banaras.

Nayana became Ramana's disciple and moulded himself after his guru. With the permission of the sage Nayana performed tapas for some time in Tiruvottiur and later went to Padaiveedu the kshetra of Renuka. Simultaneously, he also gathered patriotic youth into a group. It was here that a young man, Kapali Sastri by name, became Nayana's disciple. Nayana's nationalistic activities were noticed by the police. Nayana's disciples, undetected by the police, removed Uma Sahasram and concealed it under the sands of river Kundalini. There was, that night, a flood in the river and the manuscript of Uma Sahasram was washed away by the swirling waters. The police ordered Nayana to leave Padaiveedu forth with. In the meantime the news came that Visalakshamma gave birth to a girl child (12.5.1908). Nayana went to Vellore and named the child "Vajreswari". Nayana returned to Padaiveedu and did tapas for 40 days. At the end of the tapas, Goddess Renuka Devi appeared, along with her companions, and entering his body infused tremendous power into it. Nayana had the extraordinary experience that the divine weapon of "Shakti" held in his hand by Lord Kumaraswami poured its energy into his (Nayana's) body. He had a vision of the "Astravidya mahamantra" mentioned in the Rig Veda. With that he acquired the power to unlock the secret meaning of Vedic hymns.

Nayana returned to Vellore and initiated the youthful members of "Indra Sangh" with "Astramantra". The government considered it an illegal, revolutionary act and sent a warrant to arrest Nayana. Nayana, in

a disguised form, started for Hampi, but because of the treachery of a thief, had to spend a night in jail. The next day the police inspector came to know about Nayana, released him and became his disciple receiving initiation from him. Nayana did tapas in "Mauli" for a month. The deity of that Kshetra appeared to Kavya Kantha in a vision and told him that the time has not yet come for getting "astrasiddhi" (attaining perfection in acquiring the power of the mantra). Nayana realised that India's independence was far away. He then initiated many devotees and disciples with the "mahamantra" and kept research into the subtleties of Vedas as his primary aim.

Nayana lived in Ramana's presence for some time. Then he went on a south Indian pilgrimage. He stayed at Jambukeswara for 10 days, and, meditating on Devi Akhilandeswari composed again the 700 slokas which were lost, due to the flood, of *Uma Sahasram*. In 1910, he came to Vellore, performed the thread ceremony (upanayana) of his son, Mahadeva, and with his family reached Tiruvannamalai. He became a disciple of Ramana Maharshi along with M.H.Humphreys. During the years 1910-1912, Nayana stayed in Madras. After that, for some time, he did tapas at Udupi in Balarama Kshetra. The pontiff of Udupi Math honored kavyakantha with due ceremony. In that context, Nayana composed *Tattvaghanta Sataka* extempore, in which he gave an epitome of the three philosophical schools Advaita, Dvaita and Vishishtadvaita. In April 1912 Nayana and his wife reached Gokarna and did penance there. Nayana defeated a scholar by name Ananta Sastri and established the supremacy of "Indramata" in the country. There, clarifying the doubts of some pandits in Parasara Samhita, Nayana wrote *Laghu samhita*. In a fortnight he committed to memory the Vedic recension of Vedic samhitas extant in the Gokarna region. When Kavyakantha and his wife were doing tapas in the Ganesha temple, Ganesha Sarma served them with great devotion. He later became famous as Daivarata. He was a great scholar, an adept in the perception of the secret of mantras. Pakalapati Guru (1911 -1970) is another great Yogi who served Nayana in Kaluvarayi and learnt many secrets of the science of Yoga. Nayana did a fresh

exploration correlating the Puranic stories and the meaning of Vedic mantras and vice versa. They are a testimony to his unique genius.

In 1912 Nayana was in Kaluvarayi during the last days of his father's life and after performing the funeral rites had darshan of Ramana in Arunachala. Then he went to Gokama and acted as Brihaspati for the Jyotishtoma Yajna performed in the Sannabela Ashram and explained in Sanskrit the purport of Vedic Yajnas and the meaning of the respective mantras. On the final day of the conference he spoke fluently and forcefully in Kannada, and astonished the learned gathering.

In August 1913, Nayana visited the twin cities Hyderabad and Secunderabad and gave initiation to many aspirants. He spoke at many gatherings. He saved the lives of the two daughters of a devotee-Subrahmanya Iyer- from the fatal small pox, by administering theertham sanctified by mantras. He again went to Kaluvarayi to perform his father's annual ceremonies, and in January, 1914, he visited Secunderabad again. In a nearby village, 'karkeli', he did tapas for 4 months. To fulfil the desire of his wife he undertook a north Indian Pilgrimage. Mother stayed doing tapas in Bhuvaneshwar for four months concentrating on Bhuvaneshwari Mantra and achieved perfection in that, - akshyatvasiddhi. This power became evident in the context of Nayana performing obsequies of his mother. At the request of the royal family, Nayana and his wife stayed in Mandasa for a long time. In 1916, they performed Vajreswari's marriage at Kaluvarayi. Nayana then gave lectures in Nellore, on the significance of the Veda, Sastra traditions. Later, he went to Tiruvannamalai and had darshan of Bhagavan Ramana. He then returned to Mandasa and named the Sivalinga on the hill there as "Daharagokameswara". There for 20 days he undertook enquiry into the roots of "who am I?" and had the experience that the power and radiance of Parasurama entered his body. Parasurama appeared in the form of a sage with matted hair and infused his power into Kavyakantha's consciousness.

In 1917 Nayana came to Arunachala with his wife, and with the

permission of Ramana Maharshi wanted to stay in Virupaksha cave. But Ramana Bhagavan's attendant Palani Swami refused to give the keys. Nayana's anger burst out like wild fire. But he repented in no time and recited a hymn in praise of Indra. As a result there was rain and a danger was averted when a thunderbolt fell on the temple chariot. Raman Maharshi was satisfied and made Nayana vow that from that moment onwards he will not give way to anger. Ramana Maharshi fed curd rice to Nayana with his own hands. However, Palani died from the curse. Nayana lived with Maharshi in Skandashram and wrote *Dasamahavidyasara* in 475 sutras in 3 days. He completed another book *Ramana Gita*, went with Daivarata to Palaiveedu did tapas for 40 days there. He then returned to Arunchala, gave the monastic vows to Ramana Maharshi's brother and mother and went to Kaluvarayi. On 15.3.1918, his son Mahadeva's marriage was performed. Nayana and his wife went to Secunderabad where they stayed from October 1918 to December 1919. Those were the days when the Independence Movement was powerfully taking shape. Nayana recognised Gandhiji as embodying the essence of sage Maitreya. Nayana then went with mother to Madras and wrote *Rajayogasaram* there.

In April 1929, Nayana reached Arunachala, revised *Umasahasram* and decided to write *Indrani Sapta Sathi*. But because of severe pain in the head, and unbearable heat in the spine, he couldn't even move. When a message was sent to Ramana Maharshi, he remained silent. At midnight a sound emanated from Nayana's head. He was then sitting in the cave. The sound was so loud that "mother" and Vajreswari who were sitting outside the cave could hear it. A radiant light resembling the moonlight encircled the cave and touched its top. Thick smoke came out from Nayana's body. Nayana experienced the piercing of the skull-Sirsha Kapalabhedana and he attained a nectarean experience.

The pain was removed. At daybreak Bhagavan Ramana came, took Nayana from out of the cave into a room and made him drink some milk. From the middle of Nayana's head, hair of the size of a palm had fallen. Ramana Maharshi got necessary arrangements for Nayana made

meticulously. Nayana completed writing *Indranisaptasathi* in 20 days. He went to Padaiveedu and read out *Saptasathi*. Goddess Renukadevi appeared. Nayana offered prayers to Indrani for the achievement of freedom for women, the removal of the plight of the so-called untouchables and the caste system. He also sought clarification for doubts regarding the meaning of Vedic texts. Nayana was concerned not so much with the attaining of yogic (occult) powers as with achieving independence for his country sunk in a despicable condition. The slokas Nayana wrote in this regard affirm this concern. In 1922, Nayana named the linga which Ramana Maharshi installed on his mother's samadhi as "Matribhuteswara Linga". He then did tapas for 4 months in Chuta cave. He presented (in 1923) *Umasahasram* to Ramana Maharshi. It was printed in 1942.

Kavyakantha attended the All India Congress meeting held at Kakinada in December, 1923. In his discourse, he proved, with relevant and authoritative sources from the Vedas and other sacred texts that women also have equal right to rituals such as Upanayana, homa and sraddha. In the meeting at Alamuru, he silenced the pandits by his vigorous arguments against untouchability and the need to abolish it. The same plea he made at the Dravida State congress meet held at Belgaum (1924). Next day when Gandhiji was supporting Hindi as the National Language, Nayana made an attempt to propose Sanskrit in its place. But Gandhiji didn't allow him to express his opinions. Nayana gave up his political activities. However he wrote a book *Rashtra Nibandhana* which exhorted people to be patriotic. Expressing his conviction that Sanskrit should be the world language, he wrote *Lali Bhashopadesa*. He left Belgaum and spending three months in Gokarna and Bombay he reached Tiruvannamalai. He suffered for three months from severe urinary troubles. But he continued to write many books. In Sarmadevi Kshetra (the place associated with the tapas of Sri Narayana Tirtha), Subrahmanya Iyer established a Gurukula where people could eat together without distinctions of caste. There Kavyakantha proposed that the cook should be a Harijan-a suggestion which filled the upper caste people with intense anger. In 1925, in a similar way, he propagated social reform in a meeting

of Sanatana Dharma. He recognized Nrisimha Kshetra at Mangalagiri as the Kshetra of Indra. In 1926 he wrote a novel in Sanskrit at Tiruvannamalai. It was named *Pooma*. In 1926, for the purpose of printing Nayana's books, Daivarata established a press at Sirasi. Nayana wrote more than 75 books. Of these 21 are stotras, 24 Sutra texts, 3 philosophical treatises, 7 commentaries, 3 on Ayurveda, 3 on Astrology, 1 on a historical subject. On 18.7.1926 "Mother" (Nayana's wife) died.

In 1927 Nayana visited Secunderabad and gave several talks on Ramana Bhagavan's teachings. He gave initiation to thousands of aspirants. He presided over the Silver Jubilee Celebrations of Sri Krishnadevaraya Andhra Bhasha Nilayam (4.2.1927). The members of the Adi Hindu Society of Hyderabad took out a procession carrying Nayana in a palanquin and conferred on him the title "Muni". In December 1927, at a meeting of pandits, presided over by Madan Mohan Malaviya, Nayana spoke about the dire need for the abolition of untouchability. Malaviya praised Nayana, but he was the object of intense anger of orthodox Hindus. He debated vigorously with Malladi supporting the entry of Harijans into temple. For some time he stayed in Ramanasramam but finding the atmosphere there not congenial, he went to Sri Aurobindo Ashram, with the permission of Ramana Maharshi. Nayana felt that Aurobindo was an associate sage in his previous birth and that he was far superior to himself. He reached Aurobindo Ashram on the eve of the jayanthi of the great sage. For two minutes the two sages looked at each other. They recognised each other's greatness. The Mother also meditated with Nayana. Nayana wrote the preface and 10 pages of "*Tattvanusasanam*" to the book *Mother, (Janani)*. Aurobindo read it and praised it. Nayana returned to Tiruvannamalai and wrote *Indra Stotra*.

Unable to bear the heat of Tiruvannamalai, Nayana took Maharshi's permission, went to Gokarna, and stayed in Kaluve ashram. There with his psychic power of tapas he removed the affliction of planets Grahapeeda - to which a woman by name Ahalya was subject. With the same tremendous power he cured her husband of typhoid fever. One day when Nayana was talking to his disciples, the haystacks nearby

caught fire and the flames encircled the area. Nayana used the Parasaramantra of Fire as a result of which a terrific wind arose and threw the fiery haystacks far away from the ashram. People who witnessed this were astonished at Nayana's occult powers. In another context, when the car in which Nayana was travelling with his son Mahadeva, overturned and Mahadeva's elbow was fractured. Nayana recited the Asthisandhanamantra from Rigveda and in a split second the fracture vanished. Between 1929-31, Nayana stayed in Kaluve and then went to Ananda Ashrama in Sirasi. There he gave initiation to hundreds of devotees and made them familiar with the teachings of Ramana Bhagavan. At this stage, Nayana felt that in his interior being a divine body took birth and enveloping others with his aura. For instance, that divine body possessed a completely illiterate person by name Ramachandra Bhat and made him a Sanskrit Pandit. From Ananda Ashram Nayana wrote many letters to Ramana Bhagavan. They embody his spiritual experiences and his longing. In one letter he cited 1) Bhagavan Ramana 2) Bhagavan Indra and 3) Bharat Mata as the centres of his devotion. In another letter, he wrote that his life's goal was to have darshan of the Pure Form of the Ultimate Truth and for that, he further wrote, he needed Ramana Bhagavan's Sankalpa (Divine will). In another letter, he declared that another ambition he nursed was to worship Indra, and with the power received thereby, to liberate India from its bondage. This was the desire that was left in him. From these letters we realise how intense Nayana's patriotism was. On 14.3.1931, he translated into Sanskrit Ramana Bhagavan's "*Forty verses*". Then he wrote *Prachanda Chandisati* and a commentary on *Ishopanishad*. IN 1933 he explored Rigveda indepth and wrote a great classic called *Bharatacharitra Pariksha*. There is hardly any other book which synthesizes Vedas and Puranas with the brilliance and originality that this book does. Nayana's lectures in this area given at the Andhra university in 1934 so impressed and charmed the then vice-chancellor Dr. S. Radha Krishnan that he offered him a professorship in the university. But Nayana gently declined saying that he could never give up his vocation of tapas.

Nemani Suryanarayana who heard Nayana's discourses in the Indian Institute Kharagpur was highly impressed and became his disciple. He invited Nayana to Calcutta. Nayana reached Calcutta on 24.11.1934 and stayed at the house of Gunturu Lakshmikantham. Lakshmikantham discovered a strange thing. Nayana was none other than the great sage siddha purusha he saw in dream 10 years earlier. Lakshmikantham became his disciple and wrote his most definitive biography by the title Nayana. Nayana gave many discourses in Calcutta on his own life, the unique significance of various Avatars, dates of the Vedas, message of Ramana etc. Hundreds of people became initiated disciples. He initiated Lakshmikantham's wife with the Gayatri Mantra. In one context Nayana's divine (astral) body possessed Lakshmikantham. In Kharagpur, Nayana stayed in the house of Achaalla Parvatheesam. From there he went, with Gopala Sastri, a yogi, to Kanchi and had darshan of Chandrasekharendra Saraswati Swami. The Swami treated Nayana with respect and affection. During Nayana's visit to Kaluvarayi to attend his grandson's naming ceremony, a copper coin that he found, the moment he touched got transformed into a gold coin. On 21.9.1935, Nayana returned to Kharagpur. There the devotees got a foundation stone laid for an ashram meant for himself. One night he showed the alchemical gift of turning base metal into gold. Another strange thing happened when Nayana went to Calcutta on 22.3.1935. Nemani Suryanarayana, his disciple held an iron key one and a half yards high above Nayana's head and kept it like that for two or three minutes. Later, that key, magnetized now, attracted iron filings. In other words, from Nayana's head electricity flowed always. Nayana started writing the purport for Vishwa Mimamsa and his autobiography in Telugu. He also wrote commentary which gave a spiritual orientation to the various Vedic rituals.

On 25.4.1936 Nayana came to the ashram in Kharagpur. Thousands of persons there became his disciples. Nayana manifested many occult, supernatural powers there. He foretold the dethroning of the emperor of Abyssinia. But severe tapas and prolific writing of books made his health decline greatly by 21-7-1936. Telegrams were sent to Ramana

Maharshi and Mahadeva. Four days before, he told that he was giving up the body. On 25.7.1936, he made his disciples perform a homa and at half past two gave up his body. (Saturday, Dhatru year, Sravana Shuddha Saptami). No pain or strain marked his passing away. There is no one else who synthesised Veda, Sastra, Kavya and Purana as Nayana could. Gunturu Laksmikantam gives us a verbal portrait of Nayana's personality: He was 5ft 12inches height; slim, golden hued body; broad forehead, bald head, a head that suggested full flowering; eyes scintillating with knowledge and wisdom; thick eyebrows; thin moustache; soft beard; a voice that sounded like a bell; and authoritative sound; lips that registered a charming smile; a fatherly attitude suggesting affection and evoking emotional warmth; the figure of a sage of Krita yuga. All these formed his exquisite personality. As Vivekananda was to Ramakrishna, Nayana was to Ramana Maharshi. Today all devotees of Ramana are also devotees of Nayana. At Sri Ramana centers, devotees celebrate Nayana's advent also.

Nayana's son, Mahadeva was a scholar and researcher in Sanskrit and Telugu. He worked in Tanjore Saraswati Mahal Library unearthened many precious manuscripts and published them. He passed away in 1966. Maitravaruna, Mahadeva's son, wrote a commentary on his grandfather's *Uma sahasrasam*. Kavyakanta Vasistha Ganapati Muni is a long, big name. "Kavyakantha" is the title conferred by the Navadwip pandits; "Muni" was conferred by the Adi Hindu Society; the family's genealogical sage is Vasishtha; their element is Ganapati. Sri Ramana called him Nayana. The Tamil Nayana is "Ganapati". Nayana means father for the Telugus.

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34. MALAYALA SWAMI

(1885 - 1962)

Great sages are born with the aim of rescuing creatures - jivas -and that is the reason for their taking birth. This function each does in his/her own way. Some have the nature of fish. Just as fish do not come out leaving water, these sages do tapas in solitude and become, thereby, instrumental for universal harmony and peace. Some have the nature of some animals which do not enter water but roam on the ground. They propagate practical spirituality by their own life style and thus promote the welfare of the world. Some others have the temperament and nature of a tortoise. Like the tortoise able to move on both land and water, some sages live in solitude for some time and then teach self-realization coming out for some periods. Maharshi sadguru Malayala Swami is of this nature: he did intense tapas in solitude, realized the Supreme reality, and by teaching the truths of what he has realized contributed to the welfare of the world in his own unique way. It is the decision of the Almighty who should serve the world in which way. Malayalaswamiji's service is multifaceted. Like Adi Sankara he was born in Kerala and developed a sense of intense detachment and discrimination in his boyhood itself; entered a gurukula practicing japa, tapa and dhyana; travelled all ' over India from Kanyakumari to the Himalayas; neutralized the efforts of those who, in the name of sanatana dharma, ancient wisdom, severely limited the spread of spiritual education ; did intense tapas for 12 long years in the Gogarbha Kshetra in Tirumala-Tirupati and achieved self- realization ; established Vyasashrama in Erpedu and gave sanyasa vows to many showing them the way to liberation ; propagated "Brahma Vidya"-the education of the spirit, publishing hundreds of spiritual books in both Telugu and Sanskrit. In this way, Malayala Swami did yeoman service to Andhra.

Comparable to Tirumala-Tirupati in Andhra is Guruvayur in Kerala. Engandyur near Guruvayur is lavishly endowed by nature's wealth. In the 19th century there lived in that village a pious couple by name Kariappa

and Nottiamma. They were greatly devoted to God. Kariappa was a farmer and he was also one who was of medical help to people. Thus cultivation and medical practice were the family traditions. Their vocation was to serve guests and cure the sick. Their daily routines were to read *Bharatam* and *Bhagavatam* and serve saints and sages. Nottiamma went often for the darshan of Guruvayurappa and prayed for a child who would exemplify all ethical and spiritual qualities. She gave birth to two sons and a daughter. The third son - the great Malayala Swami in future was born on 29.3.1885 (Parthiva Year, Chaitra Shuddha Ekadasi).

The child was given the name Velappa. This was a strange child: when he was placed on the soft silk bed of the cradle he used to feel uncomfortable and feel breathless. Even when he was laid on a mat on the floor, the child used to roll away from even that. On the bare, hard floor he slept soundly. A wandering Sadhu - a bairagi - who saw this strange thing prophesied that the child will become, in future, a sage of complete renunciation. He will grow up, Astrologers said, going to a distant region he will achieve uncommon renown. The parents, hearing this felt both joyful and sorrowful. As he grew up, Velappa's desire for solitude intensified. He had no desire to eat all kinds of things as children of that age do; he preferred solitude and not play as children generally do. He used to sit alone and meditate on what we do not know. Later these tendencies grew in Velappa as the spiritual qualities of moderate eating, living in solitude, contemplation on Brahman, the Supreme Reality. He was initiated into education and taught his mother tongue, Malayalam. Velappa mastered the lesson that was taught every day on that very day. He used to attend Harikathas on Bhagavatam and with rapt attention enjoyed and absorbed them. He used to observe the vows of Ekadasi.

Velappa had in born compassion for animals and birds, indeed all creatures. One day while returning from school, he saw a hunter, selling forest birds. Velappa ran home, got some money from his mother, bought those birds caressed them with affection and freed them into the sky. They thus escaped imminent death. Nottiamma coming to know about this, shed tears of joy and blessed her son. This is an early context which

anticipates what the later Malayala Swami phrased as a sutra. "A compassionate heart is God's temple". This sutra is now the motto of the Swami's Samadhi. Velappa followed the Vedic injunctions : Mother is God, Father is God, Guru is God, the Guest is God. Velappa delighted in making the boys do bhajans. He also got immersed in meditation in the cottage near his home. One day when he was totally absorbed in this way his brother came and slapped him on the cheek and asked him angrily to come out of his contemplation. When the brother started returning he found the Mahanandi barring his exit. The sight that terrified him and he ran to his mother and told her about this. Velappa's father tried to make Velappa go in for English education. But Velappa left to learn Sanskrit which, he knew, was necessary for his spiritual quest.

20 miles away from Tiruvananthapuram, in a village called Varkala there is a gurukula by name "Sivagiri". It was established by Sri Narayana Guru (1854-1928) who was a revolutionary saint of Kerala. He agitated, much before Mahatma Gandhi, for the abolition of untouchability. He was a great spiritual luminaiy who taught one caste, one religion and one God thus paving the way for universal religious values. Just as Vivekananda was the chief disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, Sivalinga Guruswami was the foremost disciple of Sri Narayana Guru. He used to propagate in Peringotkara village of 10 miles distance from Engandyur, Sanskrit and spiritual modes to all without any distinction of caste or creed. Velappa joined that gurukula and studying Sanskrit, served his guru and any visitors who came there. His dedicated service endeared him to the Guru. There Velappa was called by all as "Bhaktan" Sivalinga Guru was pleased by Velappa's sadhana and at an auspicious hour initiated him and taught him the secrets of Ashtangayoga, experiences in the state of meditation, secrets of yoga, the focussing on Pranava (Om) and other aspects of sadhana. Velappa realized the secrets of the yoga system of spiritual realization. But he was inclined towards the paths of Bhakti and Jnana. Along with image worship, Vellappa pursued the path of mental worship. For him *Bhagavad Gita* was a text for daily study. He knew by memory *Patanjala Yoga Darshana*, and the ten principal Upanishads.

He roamed radiantly in the great spiritual landscapes of texts like *Yoga Vasishtha*, *Atmabodha* (of Sankara), *Viveka Chudamani*, *Manu Smriti*, etc. He also absorbed the teachings of prophets like Christ, Mohammed, Buddha and others. He made Vivekananda's teachings an integral part of his evolving consciousness.

The great spiritual revolution and social regeneration set in motion by Sri Narayana Guru have had the greatest impact on him. An extremely earnest spiritual seeker, Velappa got his doubts cleared by Sivalinga Guru swami. Sivalinga Guruswami taught him the intricacies of Upanishadic mahavakyas. After some years of intense sadhana, it was necessary, Sivaswami thought, to send Velappa for the darshan of Sri Narayana Guru. Velappa went to Varkala and prostrated to the great sage. The omniscient guru blessed him that in a very short time, Velappa will be blessed with the experience of Brahman. Velappa served Sri Narayana Guru his Parama guru for some time and returned. He told his experience to Sivaswami. Meantime, he got the news that his mother Nottamma was ill. He requested his guru for permission to leave so that he could serve his mother. The guru permitted him to go and gave him the instruction that he should always uphold the principles of celibacy, non-violence, speaking the truth, aparigraha, nonacceptance of gifts. He also told him that God's grace will descend only when he looks upon all beings in the world as the creation of God Himself.

Velappa returned to Engandyur and served his mother devotedly and she recovered. Both of Velappa's brothers were married and the relations were married and the relations advised that it is time Velappa's also got married. Velappa made it clear that he was already betrothed to the Bride of Moksha (Liberation). His meditative practices intensified. Velappa was now not even 20 years old. With the promptings of his conscience, he left on a pilgrimage, without telling any one except leaving behind a note. He wrote in that note that there was absolutely no need to worry about him, and even if they search for him, they won't find him. He also wrote that as long as they feed the guests who visit their house, he will himself be provided with food. And he won't suffer for want of anything.

The parents and others were filled with grief and prayed to God fervently that Velappa should be protected from all calamities.

Velappa started on foot to undertake pilgrimage to all sacred places. In his bag he kept *Bhagavad Gita*, *Kathopanishad*, Patanjala Yoga *Darshana*, his rosary, sacred ash, (vibhuti), a small tumbler, papers for writing and a pencil. Nothing else was there in the bag. Daily he used to cover 20 miles and eat only once food which he got by begging. First he saw Udipi, Subrahmanyam, Dharmasthala, Gokarna in Karnataka but on his way to Pandhri he fell severely sick with fever. He got laid up in a choultry because of severe dysentery. Though a fellow traveller urged him to go home and almost forced him, he refused to yield and spent the entire night in meditation on God. In a dream, somebody came put a pill in his mouth and assured him that he will never fall ill again. And he never fell sick again, true to this prophecy. Recovering his health, Velappa visited Pandharpur, Omkareshwar on the bank of Narmada river, Girnar, the sacred place associated with Dattatreya, Sudhamapuri and meeting sadhu belonging to Nanak panth in Punjab, and the tradition of Atmaramnath and Matsyendranath, he traveled through Kashmir. When he was on his way to Mathura and Brindavan, He had to cross a river. The boatmen asked him to get off the boat since he didn't have a single paise with him. Velappa did namaskar to God and the river and with great difficulty reached the other shore.

He then visited Mathura-Brindavan, completed the reading of the *Gita* in Kurukshetra, started for Hardwar and saw the Gurukula of the Arya Samajists, and their activities. He stayed in Hardwar for a month and had darshan of many saints and sages. He then decided to have an ashram on his own and closely observed the working of the choultries like Swargashram and Kalikambaliwala in Hrishikesh. It was there that he attained the state of samadhi. In Badarikashram he offered obsequies to his ancestors and also did Brahmatarpana for the welfare of entire humanity. He then spent three days in Naimisaranya, ten days in Ayodhya where he did japa of Sri Rama mantra to the tune of one lakh, collected holy water in Prayag, did lakhs of japa of Siva mantra, completed the

four month stay- chaturmasya, as it is called, finished Brahmatarpana in Gaya, sat in meditation for 3 days in Buddha Gaya and participated in the Bhajans at Navadwip, the birth place of Sri Krishna Chaitanya. Then travelling via Calcutta, and Puri Jagannath to Simhachalam and Bhadrachalam, he did tapas in a cave in Sri Sailam for a fortnight and reached Tirupati. Finally he went to Tirumala and taking a dip in the Pushakarini, he had darshan of Lord Venkateswara and reached Gogarbha Kshetra, seeing on the way Papanasana and Akasaganga.

Here Velappa experienced indescribable bliss. He decided that this was his place for tapas. He then went south, visited Arunachala, Kanchi, Chidambaram (where he did lakhs of japa), and then had darshan of Sri Ranganatha. In Palani he did abhisheka to Subrahmanaya Swami with holy water from Triveni. Via Madurai he reached Rameswaram and worshipped Ramalingeswara with holy water from Triveni, and in Sethu he meditated on Sri Ramachandra. He stayed in Kanayakumari for 34 days, reached Varkala again and after receiving the blessings of Narayana Guru reached Narayanasram and fell at the feet of Siva Linga guru. The reunion of the master and the disciple is indescribable. He narrated details of his pilgrimages and with the guru's permission reached home. By that time his father Kariappa passed away. Velappa consoled his mother and his brothers. Some days he spent with his mother some more with his guru. Velappa was then 29 years old. One night he left home again and without informing anyone he travelled via Kurtalam, Tiruvallur, Ghatikachala, Tiruttani, Sri Kalahasti, and Tiruchanur. In the third week of December 1913 he entered Gogarbhakshetra in Tirumala.

Those were the days when the independence movement was spreading rapidly. Velappa felt that along with independence (swarajya) one should also achieve freedom of the self (Swaarajaya) to achieve the welfare of the country and towards this aim saints and sages should work strenuously. However there are many obstacles in our society which prevent us from achieving this aim. Caste and creed have become powerful and the ancient principle of Guna Karma division of people has vanished. Moreover, 80 percent of people remain without secular or spiritual education. Velappa

realised that because of the selfishness of some sections of society, women and harijans and sudras were denied access to the spiritual traditions of the country. It was because of this that the country was enslaved. Velappa decided that first he must himself attain liberation and help others to achieve it. Before undertaking tapas, he prayed to God : "O compassionate One! When I will be able to attain limitless detachment, infinite knowledge, noble state of samadhi, attitude of sameness to all beings?" These are indeed Velappa's ideals which moulded his life.

His daily routine was to have darshan of Lord Venkateswara, doing tapas in the Pandava cave in the Gogarbha Kshetra, seeking alms bhiksha in Tirumala village and eating only once during the day. After some days he stopped even going out for bhiksha and ate the riceballs (Pinda) offered by pilgrims as part of obsequies to their ancestors, in Gogarbha Kshetra. His mother passed away a few days after he reached Gogarbha Kshetra. It was in these early days that pilgrims who recognised him as belonging to Malayala region started calling him "Malayala Swami". It must have been an auspicious moment, for, Velappa had been called by not other name. Malayala Swami became his permanent name. The Swami not only did tapas in Gogarbha; but, adopting the method of "atmapuja" - mental inward worship - he did worship with the eight flowers nonviolence, control of the senses, compassion towards living being, endurance, peace, penance tapas, meditation, and speaking the truth. In his tapas, Malayala Swami crossed many stages such as seeing light in the state of meditation, hearing the ten kinds of celestial sounds (nada), visions of wonderful scenes. He experienced god's grace abundantly.

Mysore Tiruvenkatacharya who was assigned the job of offering floral worship to lord Venkateswara, used to bring prasad for Malayala Swami once during the day. Once Malayala Swami couldn't come out for 3 days since the Gogarbha was filled with water. Then, Venkateswara Swami appeared in a dream to the temple shroff Naineni Subbaraya Setty, and ordered him to take prasad to Malayalaswami. Accordingly the shroff took the prasad and tying the bundle to a bamboo pole and stretched it across the water to reach Malayala Swami. Similarly,

Ramlakhan Das, the brother of Tirumale-Tirupati Mahant had a dream in which he was instructed by the Lord arranged food everyday for the Swami in the mahant's math. Immersed in deep meditation one day Malayala Swami went late for prasad and the cooks there behaved discourteously. The Swami took a vow that he would not, hence forward, take any prasad unless it comes to the place where he was staying. That day a couple from Tirupati visited the place and offered prasad to the Swami. As the Swami's power of tapas and his greatness gradually spread for and wide, pilgrims frequently visited the place and everyday some pilgrim or the other offered bhiksha to the Swami.

One year passed in this manner. The Swami's eminence spread all over Andhra. The number of pilgrims who came to have his darshan and listen to this spiritual discourses increased. The Swami used to speak in inadequate Telugu and, of course, in Sanskrit which he knew quite well. The devotees built a cottage for the Swami. He experienced through meditation the significance of the four Mahavakyas great Affirmations such as Prajnam Brahma etc. He also did incessant japa of Panchakshari, Ashtakshari, Rama Taraka Mantra, etc. Besides Gogarbhya, the Swami did tapas in Thumburu Tirtha, Sanakasananda Tirtha, Kumaradhara Tirtha, Ramakrishna Tirtha, Vaikuntha Tirtha and other Tirthas. Thumburu Tirtha was the sacred place where Thumburu and Narada did penance and the Telugu woman-saint Tarigonda Venkamma (1730-1817) achieved perfection in yoga as well as the vision of God.

In summer, Malayala Swami built a hut near the cave in which Venkamma did penance and did tapas for two months. There a tiger appeared one day and stood before the Swami. The Swami prayed to God who appeared, he felt, in the form of the tiger and that tiger gazed at him for some time and left. Once it so happened that the Swami lying behind a bush in a state of unmoving (nischala) samadhi. A hunter mistook him for an animal lying in the bush, and though he fired with his gun twice, due to God's grace, no harm was done. And before he fired the third time, the Swami himself became conscious and stood up. The hunter realised his mistake and prostrating to the sage craved his forgiveness

On another day, the Swami sat in a state of intense meditation and thought intently of the great woman saint Tarigonda Venkamma. And such was the Strength of his meditation that Venkamma herself appeared, blessed him and vanished. On another occasion, a cheetah came, looked at him and went away without doing any harm. This illustrates the fact that in the context of encountering people who follow the path of nonviolence by thought, word and deed, the wild animals do not do any harm. Once when the Swami was doing tapas in Sanakasananda tirtha, two wild, ferocious dogs came pursuing a deer and its children. They came crying to the Swami and stood near him. Seeing the Swami the dogs went back. The Swami experiences the truth of the Patanjala yoga sutra that "When a man becomes firm in refraining from harming others, all living creatures cease to feel enmity in his presence" (11.35.).

Since somebody or the other was offering bhiksha to him, the Swami wanted to test himself whether he was totally dependent on God. Therefore, without informing anyone, he left Sanakasanandana tirtha and went away to Tumburu tirtha. Some new devotees started for Sanakasanandana tirtha to offer bhiksha to the Swami, but took to a wrong path and reached Thumburu tirtha. They asked the Swami himself his whereabouts and knowing to their surprise that he was himself Malayala Swami, they offered bhiksha to him and went away. Did not God promise that he will look after the welfare of the devotees who totally surrender to Him!

When Malayala Swami was doing tapas in Sanakasanandana tirtha, a person who was curious asked him for what end he was doing tapas. The Swami replied that he was not doing tapas for God realization or any other desire; he was undertaking penance for the continuous darshan of the Lord, for removing the obstacles that prevent people from having darshan of the Lord, for making all people realize that everyone is a perfect being embodying Truth, Knowledge, Bliss and Eternal perfection. He declared that he was doing tapas to create in people the habit of working for the welfare of the world and towards achieving these ends he prayed to God to make him born again and again. The Swami also

practiced the Pranava upasana : Chanting and meditating on the primal Sound "Om". When the Swami saw in the lanes of Tirumala small children begging for food, with the assistance of the temple authorities, he started a school for them in the "Thousand legged Mantapa" premises and arranged food from the prasada offered in the temple. In the Gogarbha premises, he himself taught them Sanskrit.

Two years after the Swami reached Gogarbha, a stage actor and singer and resident of Narayanavanam by name Venkata Swami gave up his profession suffering some malady in the throat. With Vibhuthi sanctified by a mantra given by the Swami the malady disappeared and he got back his original health. With the Swami's blessings, Venkataswami established a Dramatic Society and singing bhajans and kirtans as well as propagating the swami's message of service to the downtrodden, finally settled in Kotambedu. When Cholera broke out in that village, the Swami went and stopped its ravages by the power of his penance. After six months, in a similar manner, when animals were stricken by a strange disease, "Pillisaruku", the Swami cured the animals. In 1916, the villagers constructed an ashram for the Swami and offered him 3 acres for services in the Ashram. The Swami appointed Venkata Swami as the priest in the temple. Venkata Swami developed spiritually very high to the extent of qualifying for the experience of Nirvikalpa Samadhi. The Swami gave him the monastic vows and named him Parameswaranada Giri. Another devotee, Paradesayya, became Annapoorna Swami. By 1922, the Kotambedu ashram developed as a math. In 1919, the Swami wrote a magnificent book *Sushka Vedanta Tamo Bhaskaram* condemning the pseudo - arguments of and disservice done by selfish people to society. By trenchant arguments he removed the illusions that many have about distinctions in terms of caste and creed and the view that self-knowledge is for only a few qualified people. During that time itself, he wrote *Sri Venkatesadi Puja Ratnamala, Dhyanamrita, Yadardha Bharati, Lokoddharaka* etc.

For 9 years the Swami undertook these activities: preaching the greatness of Hindu religion, writing books, removing the doubts of

disciples and above all doing tapas with utmost faith and dedication. Even then he did not attain self-realization. He was filled with intolerable despair, and taking a vow that he would commit suicide if he failed to have self-realization, he gave up food and sleep and plunged into intense tapas. One day, during the night, he heard an inner voice telling him that if he did tapas, with total commitment for 12 years, he was sure to have self-realisation. The Swami did unbroken tapas for 3 more years. He meditated steadily on the colossal meaning and significance of the Mahavakya, "Prajnanam Brahma". He was filled with complete peace, freedom from suffering of all kinds, harmony, and bliss beyond limits. The experience that the Swami had, then, was indescribable. By that time the Swami completed 40 years. The Swami's chief disciple, Parameswarananda Giri established Sivagiri Ashram near Chittoor and Annapooma Swami established Annapurna Swami Math in Ullangipalem near Machilipatnam. Both started propagating their guru's teachings, vigorously. Among those who had the privilege of serving the Swami, one should mention Menthi Venkatarayudu, Menthi Subhaya, Udayagiri Ramayya, Venkatappa Swami, Karunyananda Swami, Sadhumata of Rajahmundry, Yoginis Ramanamma, Seshamma and Mangamma. In this way, hundreds of persons in Andhra became the Swami's disciples.

After attaining self-realisation, the Swami did not stay for long in Tirumala. Since the Swami's disciples were increasing, and bhajans on a big scale were being performed on a big scale, the orthodox people in Tirumala decided that it was indeed, proper to send the Swami out of Tirumala. The Swami also felt that leaving Tirumala was the wish of providence for two reasons : there was first in those days, no entry for the untouchables to Tirumala and second, an Ashrama of the kind, he wanted to establish in which there was no distinction of caste, creed and gender, had no place in Tirumala. The Swami left Gogarbha on 3.6.1926 and reached the Kasi Bugga sacred place near Erpedu. The Swami stayed in Gogarbha for 12 years, 5 months and 13 days. The Erpedu devotees built a cottage for the Swami's stay and for meditation purposes a thatched hut was built by name "Nishthashrama." In 1926, the ruler of

Sri Kalahasti, Kumara Venkata Lingama Naidu, gave the Swami a vast piece of land. In that land itself were established what today are known as Sri Vyasasrama Gurukula, Goshala, students hostel, office quarters for the Math etc. In course of time land in the surrounding villages was also bought and they became lands for agriculture cultivation by the ashramites.

After joining Vyasa Ashrama, the Swami persuaded the people in Kasibugga to give up animal sacrifice during the Sakti worship. He also made them give up eating meat and consuming liquor. With the occult powers he got, he brought relief to people who were possessed by evil spirits, blessed childless couple with children, the unemployed and the destitute and depressed. Then he undertook service to the people and propagation of spiritual truths. In February, 1927, he started a journal called *Yadārtha Bharati*. Many articles that were published later as books appeared initially in this journal. In 1926 the Swami established "Sanatana Dharma Paripalana Seva Samaj" and convened meetings in many places and gave discourses. Prominent people such as Sripada Krishnamurti Sastri highly lauded the Swami's work. This society was later converted into "Sanatana Vedanta Jnana Sabha" and meetings were held in many places. He inspired thousands of people with his dynamic message and made them accept the programmes undertaken according to his progressive attitude. In 1928, he started Sri Venkateswara Sanskrit High School and in 1935, a Gurukula for girls was established. Sanskrit was taught here without distinctions of caste, creed and gender. Until now the Swami wore white clothes only. But finding the difficulty that his disciples faced as a result of this, he changed to ochre robes, adopting the insignia of external sanyasa also. This was on 2.7.1936. He offered a prayer to God which today sets horripilations all over the body : " O Embodiment of Supreme Truth! You who are blessing me with ochre robes today, I am bound by your wish always. I never desired pelf and power, not even liberation. May you enhance the prestige of the Vedanta tradition through me, now going to wear the ochre clothes which, by simply wearing them, have the power of making one pure and pristine!"

Sankarananda Yatiswara who came from Kasi gave formal vows of sanyas to the Swami and gave him the monastic name Asangananda Giri. The Swami's attendant, very close disciple, and author of *Swarjya Dhanka*, Sayam Varadadasu, propagated the Swami's ideals representing the Vyasa Ashrama. He was given sanyas and he became a well-known monk by name Parabrahma-nandagiri. Vyasa Ashrama became a significant spiritual center. Maheswarananda, the Mahamandaleshwar from Haridwar visited the ashram (1938) and felt very happy at its contribution to the growth of spiritual awareness. When Mahatma Gandhi met the Swami in the residence of Bhogaraju Pattabhi Sitaramayya in Machilipatnam he praised the great work done by the Swami. Swami met Kurumaddali Picchamma avadhuta in 1936.

The orthodox people confined the sadhana mode of Omkara (Pranava) only to a few. From 1937 onwards the swami started performing "Omkara Satrayaga". It began first in Rajahmundry and the Swami taught the meditational techniques on Om to women and non-brahmin seekers. In 1943 the spiritual teaching that the Swami gave in the cotext of the "Jnana Yajna" held at Sivagiri is a unique chapter in the history of Indian philosophy. In 1945 the Swami gave permission to Sadhu Mata to confer sanyas on women. When the four month stay" - "Chaturmasa" period - was undertaken by the Swami on the banks of the Godavari (1951), thousands of "untouchables" participated in it. The celebrated scholar Charla Ganapati Sastri who saw this stupendous spectacle praised the Swami. The Swami who respected all religions as equally effective paths of spirituality made their sacred symbols figure on the emblem of his ashram. He wrote a commentary on *Bhagavatgita* and propagated its teachings. The Swami also wrote extensively and his collected writing go into 20 solid volumes ranging from stotras, expositions of various facets of Hindu dharma, Karma Yoga, Brahmacharya to commentaries on the *Gita*, *Upanishads* etc. He also got definitive commentaries written on *Yoga Vasishtha*, *Atma Purana*, *Patanjala Yoga Darshana*, *Viveka Chudamani*, etc.

Malayala Swami did yeoman service to both the spread of spiritual

knowledge and social service meant to reform the society and rid it of evils which crept into it over the years. He struggled valiantly to remove evil customs and superstitions. His service in varied forms in Andhra is as much, if not more as that done by Sri Narayana Guru in Kerala. He pointed out the vicious interpolation that selfish people introduced into sacred scriptures and shastras and earned, there by, the gratitude of scholars.

Malayala Swami knitted together Harijans, girijans, men and women, indeed all the Indians, with the thread of equality. He removed caste and creed differences and making the non-brahmins also receive the monastic vows, built maths and mandirs. Hitherto they were non-entities, now they acquired identities including qualifying for sanyas also. He adopted a new language and idiom for worship and other rituals.: "Parabrahma gothrodbhvasya". He stopped the practice of untouchability, giving dowery and encouraged widow remarriages in contexts where he thought it would be desirable. He made them give up animal sacrifice. He stopped ostentatious expenditure in marriages and performances by dancing girls. The Swami never recommended to others what he himself has not practised. Even after attaining perfection in tapas, he was as austere in his life styles as he was earlier. He was extremely strict in the observance of rules regarding food, recreation, fasting, clothes etc. He never used shoes to the end of his life. Though very big buildings were constructed Sri students, he himself lived in a small cottage. He never went back on anything he undertook. He never stretched his hand before others. He never hoarded money even for the sake of the ashram and never spent money unnecessarily. Like Sri Narayana Guru, Malayala Swami was all through life a celibate, a brahmachari. He was always self-reliant and did his work himself. Before his name he invariably wrote "Charachara Sukhabhilashi": One who desires the happiness of both sentient and the non-sentient. In 1958, after completing his 5th four-month vrata (Chaturmasa Vrata) he declared as his sankalpa. "I do not desire an empire, or even liberation. I desire only the destruction of the sorrow of the grieved and grieving." This shows how compassionate the Swami was.

Malayala Swami did not show any miracles which proclaim his occult powers. However, he used to appear in the dreams of devotees and give them protection. For instance, in 1949 he appeared in a dream to Sivagiri Govindaswami who was severely ill and removed the illness. This Govinda Swami became famous as the founder of Hare Rama Japa Yajna Samithi and he was here known as Sri Vasudevananda Swami. In 1959 a devotee took initiative and made all arrangements to hold the 33rd Sanathana Vedanta conventions at Veeraghattam but fell terribly ill and was on the point of, indeed, death. At that juncture, the Swami appeared in a dream and gave his blessings that the conventions would be held without fail. Such instances are there even after his mahasamadhi.

Since 1960 the Swami's health deteriorated and in 1962 it became serious. Even suffering from that illness at the earnest request of the devotees he attended the Sanathana Sabhas (convention) held in 1961 in Shadnagar, and Gagillapuram. On 3.4.1962 he made a disciple write out his final message. As in the case of Sankara, the Swami had Narayana Charana, Siva Charana, Rama Charana and Krishna Charanam as his chief disciples. He announced that Krishnacharanam will be the head of the ashram with Vimalanandagiri as his sanyasa name. Malayala Swami passed away on Thursday, 12.7.1962 in the morning, after doing all daily poojas. The Swami's body was kept until 14th for the sake of the darshan of devotees coming from far off places. In the evening his body was given abhisheka with Ganges water, it was also decorated and offered arathi. The body was given samadhi in the Nishthashram. All over the country memorial meetings were held. On the 20th of August 1962, in the mandalaradhana 30 thousand devotees participated. The Swami's services were praised by Sri Sankarananda, Sri Chinmayananda, and Sri Sivananda. Satya Sai Baba sent a message in which he gave a glowing tribute to the Swami for his spirit of selfless services, sacred and pure teachings which, he declared, will remain immortal. On that very day the foundation stone for the Adhishthana Mandir and on 26.1.1972 the great Swami's white marble image were installed. Malayala Swami is a great yogi and the ruler of the empire of the supreme self. Disregarding self-

advancement he desired for birth again and again only to serve his fellow beings. He was a friend of the downtrodden, the destitute and the despised people and did yeoman services for women's welfare. He drove away the darkness of ignorance and drenched the world with the light of his supreme wisdom. He was a compassionate sage who shed tears for the ignorant and the dispossessed people and one who awakened the spiritual consciousness of both the high and low. The ashram of this dynamic sage is continuing the traditions he set and with his blessings it is progressing rapidly, day by day.

More than a hundred Brahma Vidya centres are scattered all over the countries as branches of the ashram. His divine teachings and message spread all over the country due to the dedicated service of his disciples among whom mention may be made of Karunyananda, Nirmalanandagiri, Rameswaranandagiri, Nirvishaya-nandagiri, Vidya Prakasanandagiri, Sadhumata, as also householder disciples like Narayana Charanam and Samudrala Lakshmanayya. After Sri Vimalananda giri, Sri Vidyanananda giri (Since 1973) is looking after the various activities of the ashram. The entire Andhra state is deeply indebted to him for his dynamic messages embodied in the various activities of the ashram. "Do not come in the way of the self improvement of others; remove all that obstructs your own self-advancement; if possible come to the rescue of others."

We have visited the Erpedu Ashram several times and offered our obeisance at the samadhi of Malayala Swami.

Source:

1. *Maharshi Sadguru Malayala Swami Charitra -Samudrala Lakshmanayya, 1976.*

35. VADAREVU LALITANANDA

SARASWATI

(1886 - 1951)

God's powers are infinite. Indians worship that Shakti in various forms of Gods and Goddesses. One such God is Skanda, the son of Siva. He is also called Kumara Swami and Subrahmanya. 'Subbayya' and 'Subbamma' prevalent in Andhra are names which are given with intense faith in and devotion to this God. Great masters are born with the qualities of those gods to do good to humanity. Among such saints Lalithananda Sarswatati was one born with the elements of Skanda. Details of his parents, birthplace, date of birth are all derived from "Nadi grandhas" and no one revealed anything. The Swami didn't tell anything. It is said that Nandinadi has the Swami's horoscope. It is noted that he was the son of Karunakara and Jnanamambika, born with divine sanctions; it is also believed that he was born as an incarnation of Subrahmanya (Skanda). It is noted that he was born in 4987 (calculated from the beginning of Kaliyuga) and it was "Vyaya" year, Vrischika month Bahula Sashthi, Tuesday, Sravana nakshatra 20.45 ghatikas after sunrise. These are the details of his "Rasi chakra". This corresponds to 17.11.1886.

Kakarla Venkata Somayajulu, the village officer of Meluvalakkur told that Lalithananda was his uncle's son, and belonged to the Mulikinati sect of Brahmins. Further, he told that he himself got him married to his sister and that he renounced and became a sanyasi, after two children were born and his householder name was Ramaswami. From this it was concluded he was an Andhra Brahmin of Mulikinati sect settled in Tamilnadu. However other versions are there; Kari Appanna Pantulu claimed him as his own brother; Syed Murakkayar resident of Adhirampatnam in Tanjore district declared that he was his brother; a Christian lady, native of Jayapuram in Visakhapatnam district, said that he was her husband and a Kshatria lady declared that he was her husband. Skanda according to mythology, is the son of Goddess Parvati, originated from Saravana, and born from the womb of Sami tree. In the same way,

Lalithananda born with the amsa (power) of Skanda, became a relation to many people in various forms. His biography was written in prose by Acchutanna Gopala Sarma, and in a versified form by Medarametla Venkata Krishnaya. Both these writers served the Swami personally.

In Kanchi mandal of South Arcot, and on the way to the sacred Arunachala Kshetra, close to a town named Senji, was a Brahmin village (agrahara) by name Meluvalakkur. It was given as exclusive habitation for Brahmins by the ruler of Senji. In the later half of the 20th century, an orthodox Brahmin- Kakarla Venkata Narasa Somayajulu - was the village officer. Within a stone's throw from this agrahara lies the Pasumala mountain. Though the mountainous area near by does not have any grass, Pasumala itself is ever green. It has various kinds of fruit-bearing trees, herbs for use in Ayurveda medicine, caves in which yogis and siddhas do meditation, and mandirs dedicated to all the gods. It has three peaks. In the middle sikhara (peak) we find Subrahmanya Swami along with Sri valli and Devasena installed by Maharshi Agastya. In Taniyala village, 6 miles away from Pasumala, there is a temple dedicated to Kailasanatheswara and his consort Akhilandeswari. Behind the linga, at an impressive height, we find Subrahmanyeswara Swami. To the north of Taniyala, at a stone's throw we have a temple dedicated to Salyamma. In addition to these three, Vadarevu, near Chirala town in Andhara, was another abode where Lalithananda did tapas.

Some shepherd boys came to Pasumala searching for a cow which strayed from the flock. Then they saw on a stone near a cave, a swami who was handsome in appearance, with a bald head, a heavy physical frame, a protruding belly lying without any clothes. When they found him again, the next day, at the same place, they decided that he was a mad fellow or a thief. When they greeted him, he didn't respond. Some miscreants in the group beat the Swami with the sharp branches of a tree. The Swami tolerated the blows for a while and then chased them away. The blows fell on a boy who was lame and blind also. Miraculously, these deformities disappeared and he became normal. The boys reported this event to the villagers. The elders of the village as well as the village

munsif and Karanam (revenue official) came and prostrating to the Swami offered him flowers and fruits. They built a hut for the Swami. The munsif looked at the Swami intently and recognised him as his own brother-in-law who ran away from home long ago. When he addressed him as "brother-in-law" the Swami smiled and kept quiet. When the elders enquired, the Swami said that his name was Lalithananda. For some he appeared as Skanda. From that day onwards visitors from surrounding villages poured into have darshan of the Swami. The Swami sat gazing steadily at the sacred fire without batting his eyelids! He gave the sacred ash as prasad. It was a divine drug for chronic diseases.

It is said that in 1925, the Swami performed number of miracles in the home of Mani Iyer in Adi annamalai village. When one R. Ramamurti Nagapattanam saw the Swami in 1935, he was by that time itself in the state above avadhuta and also went about naked. There were no natural ablutions for a week. In 1937 he was seen sleeping on a wooden cot. Dr. Tangirala Sitaramayya saw the Swami in October, 1938 in Vizianagaram. His wife used to get fits with the slightest exertion. She regained complete health with the vibhuti and occult water given by the Swami.

After some time, thanks to the efforts of P.R. Gopalakrishna Iyer, resident of Egmore in Chennai spread the greatness of the Swami far and wide in Andhra and Tamilnadu. Iyer was an Asst Commissioner in the Government Salt Industry. Impressed by the miracles of the Swami (1939) he took him to Kakinanda. The Swami stayed for ten months in that town, performed many miracles and fulfilled the desires of countless devotees. In 1940 the Swami returned to Pasumala and stayed naked in the cave in a state of continuous samadhi. Dr. Tangirala Sitaramayya and Kosaraju Nagayya got a math built for the Swami in 1941. Gradually, choultries and temples dedicated to Subrahmanya and Ganapati took shape. In 1945 the installation of Navagrahas took place. The majority of these constructions were undertaken by the Andhra devotees. Banda Radhakrishnamurti, a rich and charitably disposed gentleman and resident of George Town in Madras was the foremost among the Swami's Andhra

devotees. He belonged to the lineage of Banda Paradesi Mantri; In 1947 the installation of the Naga deity was done by the Tahsildar of Senji. D.N.Sivaramakrishna Iyer. That very year the Swami Performed Gayatri yaga in a big way for 48 days.

The propagation of the Sanatana Dharma done by the Swami was singular and unique. The advent of the great master who was born with the Skanda amsa, was for the sake of the regeneration of vaidika dharma through yajna, mantra and practical vendanta philosophy. The kind of Rudrayaga he performed was, it is said, not seen as done by any one else for so many centuries. He performed yajnas for infusing the ancient vedic truths with new life and dynamism. When the devotees took prasada at one place, without distinctions of caste, color or creed and disregarding differences of rich and poor, one was reminded of the ashrams of the sages and their sacred rituals in ancient times. When, in his absence, the traditional priests committed mistakes in the performance of the yajnas, he took them to task. Even after total self-realisation, he lived among the common people and worked for their total upliftment. He always propagated practical spirituality. Construction of temples and installation of deities, renovation of dilapidated temples, Kumbhabhishekam, healing of illnesses through mantra, yantra modes as well as propitiation of deities, worship of divine forms, - these were activities the Swami favoured most. He emphasized ethical codes and their practical application in daily life, as well as a sense of detachment, vairagya. He held that this was the real spiritual quest and it was necessary for the sadhaka to achieve purity of the mind by doing good acts. The seeker will then be fit for the instruction of jnana marga and only one who qualifies himself thus, gets a sadguru, and only by serving the guru one gets his grace and by the grace of the guru alone the achievement of moksha or liberation becomes easy.

The Swami tested his disciples in a number of ways. He filled them with the illusion that he was an ordinary person. He used to take coffee and chew pan. (Betel leaves). He talked bluntly without any reservation. Often, he accepted invitations to visit a place for the sake of devotees

but failed to turn up there. For people who came for getting cured of their illnesses, he gave sacred ash or a talisman. But they didn't effect any cure. In this way to fulfill any desire, he used to test their patience, spirit of service, renunciation and character. The Swami's was exceptional, supernatural intelligence but he appeared ordinary and common place, with no scholarship.. Indeed, he appeared as a fool. He always described himself in the same way. He spoke few words and those few softly. If any one boasted in his presence about his scholarship and tried to show off, the Swami used to say : "Dear! I am a dud, a mad fellow. My parents didn't give me any education." When anyone put questions with a view to resolve their doubts, he never used to give a direct answer. But if any one put a question with sincerity and honesty and a real desire to know the answer he or she used to get an answer on their own, when they were in his presence. He used to ask them to look up a page of a journal or a book lying there and the answer was invariably in those pages.

Once when the Swami was staying in Tiruvannamalai a woman (Christian) missionary from Switzerland asked him a question. The Swami gave the Bible which was with him at that time and asked her to read a particular page. The lady knew the entire Bible by memory and replied that there was nothing like an answer in the page indicated. When the Swami insisted she opened the page and read it. And found, to her incredible astonishment the answer on that very page.

The Swami used to tell the pasts of visitors, as if he has physically seen. In 1947 the Swami got the Navaratri celebrations performed in the house of Venkata Rao in Chirala. In that context, Karlapalem Subbaramayya, resident of Swama village, came to Chirala and had darshan of the Swami. As soon as the Swami saw him, he told him : "In your grand father Boodaraju Venkataratnam's house, for more than 100 years there was a pedestal for worship of the family deities. It was being worshipped with all the formalities. After wards, they kept it in the Siva temple. There it is lying now without receiving any worship and covered by cobwebs. Get them and begin worshipping them." Subbaramayya immediately went there and got it. Once Acchuyutanna Gopala Sarma

was travelling, with Swamiji, to Tiruttani. On the way he hired a boy to carry the rather heavy luggage. The boy saw the weird external figure of the Swami and started heckling him. The Swami told him: "you have three elder sisters, two younger brothers. Your father died and your mother is sick." The boy was stunned. The Swami didn't stop there but asked him : "you entered the last house in your lane', saying that your hen went inside. What did you do to that girl who was alone in that house?" The boy was terror-stricken and bowed down to the Swami.

When the Swami was in Chirala, a devotee by name Loka Ramachandra Rao came for the Swami's darshan, along with his friends. The Swami told him : "For a long time in the ground near the temple in your village, a Sivalinga and the images of Nandi and Divine Mother are lying uncared for. Take them out and get them installed." Ramachandra Rao went back to his village, and found the images exactly at the very place the Swami indicated. Once a devotee from Timmasamudram came to tell the Swami his plight. The Swami said : "you gave away the Chandramouliswara Crystal image to an undeserving person. That's why so many calamities are befalling your children." When a person came with an unbearable pain in the hip joint, the Swami touched his own joint and the pain vanished. The Swami cured many types of diseases or calamities by giving a talisman or sacred ash.

Loka Ramachandra Rao invited the Swami to kindly install the images dug out from the ground. In 1948 the Swami performed the installation and arranged for the necessary celebrations. Strangely, the image of Nandi was so heavy that it was impossible to lift it by any number of people. The Swami broke a coconut before and ordered it to move and it did, with the strength of only two people. Before the installation of the image of Divine Mother, Tripura Sundari, the Swami ordered that the dhvaja stambha should be raised. He then went inside the temple and closed the doors. Ramachandra Rao wondered how the sacred pillar - dhvaja sthambha - could be raised before the installation of the Divine mother's image. Wondering thus, he opened the closed doors and was stunned to see the Mother's image already installed. It is inexplicable

how an image which could not be lifted by six strongest men was lifted by the Swami alone. Such superhuman feats appear frequently in the lives of Mouna Swami and Brahmananda Saraswati Swami also.

In 1948 the Swami arranged for the performance of Gayatri Yajna for 48 days, in Pasumala. An unusual incident happened in this context. Before the final, complete offering - Poomahuti - the Swami asked them to go round the hill (Giripradakshina). They said they couldn't do that since the heat was severe and unbearable. Gopala Sarma told the Swami about this. The Swami asked them to wait for a while. Within no time the cloudless sky was covered with huge clouds and it rained heavily. Then sunshine came again. It became cool. One big cloud covered those who were undertaking giripradakshina. All those who came to witness the yajna were overjoyed at this miracle.

In 1949, the Swami arranged that a Rudra yaga, and as supplements to this subrahmanya Shadakshara yaga, Gayatri yaga and Sata Chandi yaga also were performed. In that context the Swami performed the thread ceremony of 13 young brahmacharis. In this context, the images of Subrahmanya, Valli and Devasena as well as Vinayaka were installed in the choultry, according to the proper agama rites. Lakhs of people were given food. The Swami served Turiyananda who came to witness the yagas. This shows Lalithananda's humility and modesty and total absence of ego. We can also guess the Swami's sense of equality and spirit of oneness when we know that Kurumaddali Mala Picchamma, too, attended the yaga. When Mala Picchamma gave some fruits to the Swami, he put them inside basket, stating that they were not ripe enough. Then Mala Picchamma offered ripe fruits and what is more she herself fed him the fruits. Those who saw this, were reminded of Sabari who fed Sri Ramachandra in a similar manner. Indeed, they even appeared as Sabari and Sri Ramachndra to the devotees. Even the orthodox who saw this scene prostrated to them. The Swami asked Picchamma to climb the hill and have darshan of Lord Subrahmanya. None could keep pace with the fasting Picchamma as she started climbing the hill. She had darshan of the image not as Subrahmanya Swami but in the form of a

serpent. When the flames during Pumahuti touched tops of the yajnasala, the Swami ordered them to stop rising and they did instantly. The Swami told the devotees : "Not only here but all the Maharshis are performing yajnas in the caves of the mountains." As evidence of what the Swami said, they heard, at midnight the sounds of vedic chanting and the musical cadences of Veena. In this context, the Swami performed a miracle. A devotee, by name Potharaju Venkata Subba Rao came to witness the Yajna, from Duggirala. He left behind his wife Lakshmi Devi at home so that she could serve their son who had no legs. Lakshmi Devi was filled with grief, at night time, that she didn't have the good fortune to see such a magnificent yaga. The Swami appeared in her dream and in a split second took her to the grounds where yagas were being performed, showed her all the things connected with the yaga and then brought her back to her house. When she started telling more details than what her husband saw with his own eyes, not only her husband but all her relatives were filled with wonder and delight.

A new village called "Gandhigrama" took shape near Duggirala. Lalithananda with the help of Anne Veera Raghavaiah got a temple built for Sri Ramachandra and installed the image. That very year (in the month of Vaisakha) an ashram was built at Vadarevu. When the Swami went out looking for a suitable place for the ashram, a Garuda bird circumambulated around the Swami three times, started showing him the way. Where it alighted, the Swami built the ashram. The owners of the land Kaja Sitaramayya and Veeraraghavaiah gave 3 acres to the Swami freely and felt blessed in the construction of the ashram. Adusumilli Sri Hari Rao and Accyutanna Subba Rao helped a lot. In Taniyala village, at the Swami's suggestion a Chamundeswari yaga was performed from 20.2.1950 to 2.3.1950.

The Swami performed many miracles in the context of this yaga. One day without rhyme or reason the yaga ground and the utensils of yajna lost their luster. The devotees were highly agitated, and filled with fright. Declaring that the Divine Mother felt offended or disregarded, the Swami left for an unknown destination. He came back and a luminous,

radiant lady was seen sitting in the car along with the Swami. As soon as the Swami got off the car, the lady vanished. The yagasala and the kalasas (utensils) got their luster restored. The next day, the Swami went to Deevanur and installed the image of Ganapati there. The Swami told the greatness and powerful nature of Ganapati installed there in the form of a story. Devotees brought numerous coconuts for the installation of Ganapati. However, they fell short of one. Even when they combed every shop, not even one coconut was available. Finally, they found a coconut tree in the compound of a house. When they went and asked the lady to give one coconut for performing the sacred function she refused point blank. When they repeatedly requested her, she asked sarcastically : "Does your Ganapati have two horns? What is special about him?" She also mocked the elephant faced God. Instantly, horns grew on all the coconuts hanging on the tree. The lady was filled with dread, got all the coconuts plucked and offered them for the sacred function.

The Swami went to Taniyala got an abhisheka performed to Goddess Salyamma, had darshan of "Krittika lamp" in Arunachala, worshipped Kartikyea and went back to Pasumala. He then left the place for a period of 30 days and returned. A devotee who was waiting there for the Swami's darshan asked another devotee from where the swami got so much money for performing so many Yajnas. The Swami overheard this and took that person to his room and asked him to see his trunk box. It was an empty box. There was an empty bag in that trunk box. The swami took out that empty bag in the presence of all the devotees and putting his hand in that empty bag pulled out wad after wad of currency notes. He distributed the notes among the devotees there. He said: "This is not illegal money. My mother gives me all the money that is necessary. Only yesterday I went to your place and saw my wife." The devotees were puzzled what relations does he have in their village. The Swami stayed in pasumala for some days and said that he did not have energy to walk and wanted a walking stick. He then went to Cuddalore from Pasumala, taking three ladies with him as escorts. There the Swami showed at midnight Khandayoga (Dismemberment of the body) to one

of the ladies. She was terrified and started crying with fright. All the people there rushed but saw that the Swami, as usual, was safe with all his limbs intact as before.

After returning to Pasumala the Swami one day told the devotees: "Narada Maharshi has come for me. My mother sent him. I have to go otherwise She will beat me". When the devotees were taken aback not able to understand what the Swami was saying, "Tomorrow or day after I shall leave. Even after I am gone, I shall not leave you. Don't be afraid. Like parents, I shall continue to protect you. Whether you worship or not, it doesn't matter, you shall all receive my protection." When the devotees pressed him to tell what he had in mind since they suspected that some calamity was going to happen, the Swami spoke words which distracted their minds. One day while going round the giri, the devotees noticed that a big peepal tree had dried up. Filled with fearful forebodings, they told this to the Swami who replied in a matter-of-fact way: "What is there? today the tree and tomorrow I myself will go away!" After some days, the Swami went to Vadarevu installed the images of Ganapati and the Navagrahas there and returned. The devotees there told him: "Yesterday morning, immediately after we came awake from sleep, we saw before our eyes, a radiant light - as thick as a walking stick - rise and reach the sky. We were filled with great indescribable fear. What is the significance of this?" The Swami replied : " I am also, like all of you, an ordinary person. How do I know what its significance is ? But I heard my mother saying that when such a thing appears, a great person will die. He then asked the devotees to go back to their respective villages.

After some days he went to Vadarevu, performed the Navaratri worship for nine days in Guntur, made his devotees happy and came back to Pasumala. He told the devotees sitting before him : "There is a very good path to my native place. Listen you must walk on that path / way disregarding both loss and gain. You should have the qualities of truth, patience, tolerance and doing good to others. You should not find fault with others. You should do japa and tapas regularly. Share the

difficulties and sufferings of others. Free yourself from pride. Forget distinctions between caste, creed and religion. Don't crave for money and wealth. Don't tell lies. Don't become slaves to various vices and addictions. Don't despise the poor and the destitute. Don't have false notions of high and low. Don't crave for and seek for positions of worldly power and pelf. Don't forget your gurus. If you go on this path, that path (towards my native place) will be within your reach. If you travel along that path, you will find our followers. If you ask them, everything will become clear." These words of Lalithananda embody the essence of practical Vedanta, and the quintessence of all religions.

The Swami gave up food, tambula and sat in a room silently. Even the closest devotees were outside. They saw a light, akin to the full moon light, emerged from the room and moved up towards the sky. The devotees felt that something happened, opened the door and they saw that the swami gave up his physical frame. The date was 24.11.1951. Saturday (It was Khara year, Kartika Bhaula Dasami). Telegrams were sent to devotees living far away. The devotees of the surrounding villages rushed to the Swami's place. The Swami's samadhi was performed according to all customary rites; afterwards a mandir was built and Narmada linga was installed. The "Lalithananda Bhakta Samaj" was established. P.R. Gopalakrishna Iyer, the Swami's most intimate disciples was the first president and Banda Radhakrishnamurti another ardent devotees was the first secretary of the Samaj. Gopalakrishna Iyer served the Swami with utmost devotion from 1939 to the end of the sage's life. He wrote the biographies of 41 jnanis in a book he wrote in Tamil, with the title *"The sages I saw"*. His English essay- *"The saint of Pasumala"* was released after his death. Iyer took sanyas and later on became famous as "Madras Swami". He passed away in 1963. His samadhi was located near the Swami's samadhi in Pasumala. It was Gopalakrishna Iyer only who revealed to the world the guru of Lalithananda Sarasawati. It was revealed that Sri Lada Sanyasi who stayed in the Selfmanifest (Swayambhu) Subrahmanyeswara temple in Suralimalai of Madurai district was the Swami's guru. It is said that Lalithananda, following the advice

of his guru and that of Seshadri Swami of Tiruvannamalai, lived the rest of his life in Pasumla.

The Vadarevu ashram was under Lilithananda's control from 1948 to 1951. From 1962 to 1967 it was looked after by Vadarevu Swami who was famous as the second Lalithananda. From 1975 to 1981 it was under the management of P.V. Swami. Both these are siddha purushas. One can find their samadhis in the Vadarevu ashram. 1991 Sri Arulananda Swami is infusing new spirit and dynamism to the ashram. The Swami besides the usual religious activities, is also providing free educational and medical facilities and also under taking the construction of choultries for the convenience of devotees. Thus he is extending the activities of the ashram in various ways. He is an eminent yogi, knower of siddha aushada (medicinal) secrets. All the three yogis came, at the instance of providential command, from Tiruvannamalai to Vadarevu.

I saw the Vadarevu ashram on 28.9.1892. Following the suggestion of Arulananda Swami I met the Lalitananda Saraswati Swami's driver Avadhanam Kotayya who was a resident of Sitarama Nagar on the way from Guntur to Mangalagiri and recorded his experiences. Kotayya was a car driver in the tobacco company of one Maddi Venkata Subba Rao. Subba Rao became a devotee of the Swami and kept his car and the driver at his disposal. Kotayya was with the Swami at many villages and towns in Tamilnadu and Andhra during his travels. He had the occasion to see the Swami's omniscience and occult powers. One such incident was: when the Swami went to see Kurumaddali Picchamma, the woman saint asked him : "You used to drink all the cow milk available, didn't you?" And the Swami in his turn asked her: "Yes. You saw, is it ? But you used to smoke cigars, right?" Then she asked : "Did you see?" This conversation Kotayya heard. He also heard the conversation between Gudipati Venkata Chalam (the celebrated Telugu writer) and the Swami. He was once taking the Swami in the car from Gunadala to Krishna Lanka. The Swami told him: "When I saw this area 200 years ago, all this was a jungle!". Hearing this Kotayya was stunned. Even when some components of the car were broken or even when there was only half a

litre petrol in the car's tank, the car travelled for hundreds of miles under the Swami's command. Kotayya once told a lie and suffered instantly with severe stomachache. He confessed and his tummy became normal. When they went to sacred places, Kotayya saw the Swami, sitting in the car itself, do pooja which was performed under directions from the respective Gods and Goddesses themselves. Kotayya drank deep from the ocean of the Swami's compassion. If I write all that Kotayya revealed, it would be as lengthy as this essay. Here is a poem written by Kamaraju Ramamurti Sarma on the great sage :

O God! Commander of the Divine Army ! Lalithanada Saraswati, the Divine Form of Subrahmanya ! Seeing people following the evil path as a virtuous act, and getting destroyed there by, you assume the form of a monk, a sage, to uplift such a world.

Sources :

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